

Yon Toon o' Mine



LOGAN WEIR

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YON TOON O' MINE





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YON TOON O' MINE

By

LOGAN WEIR

(J. B. P.)

THE RYERSON PRESS
TORONTO

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DEDICATED

To folk of Scottish blood, who love
the fast-fading Lowland dialect. And
to sturdy Scots, wherever they may be,
who understand the kindly nomen-
clature of curlers on the ice.

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(BY J. W. BENGOUGH)

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FOREWORD

THIS bit of semi-fiction is an attempt to recall to mind the character of some Scots who settled in Canada in the early years of the nineteenth century and who laid the foundation of one of the most substantial small towns in the Dominion.

I love to revisit that old stone town of my birth; to wander up and down its quiet, clean streets; and dream of the long-gone, happy days of my youth spent there:

To linger on the kirk braeside,
Where, when a lad, I loved to ride
My wee sleigh down the winter slide
Wi' ither weans!

To climb up on the "Castle Stane"
And on its brow to stand alone,
And breathe the air o' youth again
And hae my dream!
To dream o' lads and lassies gone
O' lads I leapt wi' frae the stone
And fought wi'—straining brawn and bone,
To be supreme!

To dream aboot the old log school,
The master there; whose rig'rous rule
Made men o' mopes; and gave the fool
Some glints o' sense!
To dream aboot the old Free Kirk,
The master there; and weekly irk
O' Sabbath school; that all would shirk
On small pretence!

To daunder round the grey stone wall
That guards the graves o' great and small,
Who bore the brunt for us and all

Our kith and kin!

To tiptoe through the hallowed ground,
And softly move from mound to mound,
To read o' folk long free frae sound

O' this world's din!

To wander to the river rim,
To scan wi' eyes, now growing dim,
The deep hole where we stole to swim

In boyhood days!

Along the "washing green" to roam,
Beside the rolling waves and foam,
Where folk scoured sheep, and travelled home
In dripping claes!

To linger on the rocky shore
And listen to the river roar
Past tumbled piles on either shore
O' ruined mills!

To light my pipe! and then resume
My walk away through sweet perfume
From gardens all in summer bloom
A' ow'r the hills!

To meet a wheen o' auld-time freens,
Whose smiles bring back some lang syne scenes,
When we were all wee prattlin' weans

Wha romped thegither!

And, here and there, some younger folk,
Descendants o' the early stock,
To meet and wi' them crack a joke
When we forgather!

L. W.

PASSAGES FROM THE PAGES

"I often wonder if there would be any kirks in the world if there were no new bonnets for women to wear."

* * * * *

"In every kirk congregation there is a leader in the pews; one who might be called the 'Star' member, who is always before the eye o' the folk. He jinks and blinks and patters about; hops up to the pulpit, and glides down the aisles, tapping the ends of the pews with the tips of his fingers as he passes by.

"This 'Star' is generally a reader of books. And he will come to business meetings of the kirk particularly book-primed. The little book of Kirk Forms is his favourite companion. He carries the wee thing, like a dark lantern, secreted in his pocket. And will often pull out the bookie and flash it in the faces o' the folk, to confuse and dazzle them with the blue light of Kirk law."

* * * * *

"Through the greater part of the minister's long sermon, Tom slept, and dreamed. He dreamed of his crops, of his kye—above all, of his curling in winter. He was on the ice just then. 'Sweep it! Sweep it! Soop, ye deevil!' Ann heard his faint cry and nudged Johnnie; Johnnie nudged Bobbie, and Bobbie nudged his father, who sat up and studiously turned a leaf in his Bible. A moment or two later he fell back again into a sound sleep.

"And, while he slept, the minister's preaching droned in his ears like the murmur of the brook below his new barn. Toward the close of the sermon the drone grew louder. Words formed themselves in Tom's mind, and some sort of meaning began to attach itself to the words of the preacher: 'Rouse ye, then, brethren, and work while it is yet day, for the night cometh when no man can work!' But the words

were not the minister's in Tom's hazy mind. It was Ann he heard, urging him to get the crop in before the night fell. So, stretching his big, angular arms to their full length, he gurgled loudly through a chopping yawn, 'Ay-ay! wumman, I'll-dae-ma-best; I'll-dae-ma-best!'"

* * * * *

"The Scots o' Drumcraigie all played the game o' 'Channel Stanes' in their 'ain pairs' at home, before they settled in the wilds of Canada. And, in the thirties and forties of last century, they curled here with nicely turned bird's-eye maple blocks. Later on, they played with 'braw' stones from Kilmarnock; black, blue, grey and mottled."

"Every year a specially important game was played by them for a barrel o' meal for the poor, the competing teams being a rink of Auld Kirk curlers, and a rink of curlers from the Free Kirk. This annual fixture was looked forward to by the kirks with the greatest interest. The game was followed by a curlers' dinner, with speech and song, lasting till midnight. And, next to St. Andrew's night, with its haggis, the *Curlers' night*—with its beef and greens—was the joy of the whole year."

* * * * *

"'Tam, man; I've been watchin' for ye,' said the excited shepherd to Tom Todd at the kirk door. 'We're tae play the Frees on Tuesday, storm or shine!' At the Washing-green maybe. If the ice is no' guid there, or if it turns out stormy, we're to play on the Beaver's Dam. Whistlewood is to arrange a' that!' (He spoke hurriedly.) Looking up anxiously into Tom's face he added: 'Ye'll be on hand?' 'Ay, William,' whispered Tom; 'if it storms deevils frae the bottom o' hell, I'll be wi' ye!'

"'Awa in, then!' said the shepherd, patting Tom's fat back. And the two passed slowly into the kirk, at the moment the precentor was sounding his tuning fork for the first psalm."

* * * * *

"After Kirk service the minister and William were in the vestry alone, the minister pocketing his notes and laying off his gown and bands, and the shepherd busying himself tying up the collection in his bandanna. Both minister and elder glanced furtively at one another from time to time, but neither spoke. Both minds were running in the same direction, and there was an answering glint in each other's eyes. But the merry twinkle that passed between them had nothing to do with the sermon. The shepherd spoke first:

"It's tae be on Tuesday!"

"Tuesday?" shouted the minister, in consternation.

"Ay!" gasped William, startled.

"Dr. Langmuir scratched his forehead and took a step over to the wee white window facing the kirkyard. He adjusted his spectacles and looked through the long, pointed icicles that hung like a fringe of crystal from the frame. And, gazing upon the frozen hoods of hard snow that clung to the tops of the tombstones, he rubbed his round chin and shook his head. Suddenly he turned around and gave the shepherd a long, solemn, and deeply troubled look, and then spoke with direful emphasis:

"Are-you-not-aware, William, that-the-Presbytery-meets-on-Tuesday?"

"With that he tightened his lips and turned again to the window and glowered out upon the frozen world.

"Guid save us!" cried the astonished shepherd, throwing up his hands. "I clean forgot aboot the Presbytery! What in the world's tae be din?"

"The minister and the elder stood tense for a moment, some mysterious concurrent operation going on in their busy minds. The elder was the first again to break the silence, and there was a pleading light in his keen old eyes as his thin voice crackled: 'Can-ye-no'-hae-the-Presbytery-meetin'-pit-aff?'"

* * * * *

"When old shepherd William reached the 'Beaver's Dam' and climbed over the lip of it, puffing through a beard that looked like a bit of frozen foam, he cried, 'Hech, man,

Whistlewood, I'm sair winded and for-foughen wi' that lang trahle through the snaw! Hae ye ony o' Peter's bree wi' ye, man?"

"'Ay, William! Ahint the loggie yonder ye'll find a bit piggie wi' a drappie in't! Be carefu' o't!"

* * * * *

"'How much dae ye see o't, Tam?' cocking his broom on top of Monkland's winner. 'Aboot an inch!' answered Tom Todd, from the far hack.

"'Weel, tak' what ye see!' cried the shepherd's thin voice. 'That's aboot the borrow,' giving the direction with the edge of his broom on the ice. 'A cannie draw, wi' yer elbow in! Steady, noo!' he cried. 'Dinna look at it, lads! It's comin' fine! It's a' richt! Yer a gran' curler, Tam!' (he cried with delight). 'Losh, man!' (he suddenly growled, stroking his beard) 'ye've miss't it, man! That beats a'.' Then, turning around he mumbled sulkily to the east wind as he impatiently tapped his mull, 'Tam-never-could-curl-verra muckle-onwyway!"'

* * * * *

"The game went merrily on through the cold, bright afternoon, the woods ringing with the echoing cheers of the curlers as the tide of battle rose and fell.

"At the last end sides were even, and the game began rather loosely; to wit: 'Tak' that stane oot, Tam!' cried William (with his broom resting on the only stone in the ring).

"Crouching Tom glowered down the rink with a blinking eye. 'Gie me the borrow,' answered Tom, (waving his arm). 'An' I'll tak them-hic-baith oot!' Needless to say, Tom's stone angled away to the snow bank."

* * * * *

"Coming out through the manse gate the Auld Kirk minister met William Weems returning from the curling game. The shepherd aye came smiling to the good minister with his joys. 'Well, well! William, give me your

hand! Dr. Muckle has just been in, to tell me that you got away with the Free Kirk this afternoon. That was a victory!

“‘Ay, doctor; but it was an awfu’ warsle! Tig-tag frae the beginnin’ tae the end o’t. But I dinna come tae mention’t. I jist cried in tae mak’ sure o’ ye for the denner. You’re comin’ are ye no?’ looking eagerly up into the doctor’s face.

“‘I’ll do my best, William; I’ll do my best. I’ll be at the denner, God willing!’

“‘Dod, man! come whether or no,’ said the shepherd.

“‘What?’ snapped the doctor in astonishment.”

* * * * * *

“‘What kind o’ wumman is that mither o’ Jock’s, Meg? She never comes tae the store. But I see her passin’ by, whiles; aye brawly dressed oot!’

“‘I’ll tell ye!’ answered Meg (with a steely glint in her little squinting eyes). ‘Ower a cup o’ tea in oor hoose the ither nicht, crackin’ aboot the men folk, I telt her Owen was the only man that ever soucht me. And what dae ye think she says?’

“‘A’ weel, Meg,’ she says; ‘it’s weel tae be you; for beauty’s been my ruin a’ ma life!’ ‘That’s the kind o’ wumman Jock’s mither is, Tweedie, if ye want tae ken!’ closing one eye and giving him a cunning leer with the other.

“‘Ha!-Ha!-Ha!-Ha! But that was na’ very complimentary to you, Meg!’

“‘Complimentary. It was insultin’, Tweedie, insultin’. But that’s her! The hizzie!’”

* * * * * *

“‘There’s nae game like curlin’!’ (said the shepherd). ‘An’ noo that I’m on my feet, an’ yer a’ here, minister an’ a’, I would like tae say a word mair o’ the game in general.’ (Applause).

“‘We hae high authority for’t. Ay! the hicht o’ authority! the warrant o’ the Scripture itsel’.’ (‘Oh! Oh! Canny

William; canny man!" cried the minister). "Ay! minister, and I'll gie ye the chapter for 't, and ye ken I'm no' what ye can ca' flichty wi' the Word.'

"*Ye ken what the Preacher says in the Book o' Ecclesiastes, whar he speaks o' ploys tae be dune in time and season. He says 'There is a time to gather stanes and cast them awa'; a time to win, and a time to lose; a time to laugh, and a time to mourn.'*" (*Laughter and cheers, and 'Hoot, man!' from the minister*).

"*I'll no' affront ye haudin' doonricht steedfastly, that the ploy o' the folk then wi' their stanes wis curlin', as we ca' it. But it can be argied!*" (*'Hear! hear!' cried Foxbar, laughing*)."

* * * * *

*"Hurray for the curlin'!
Here's tae the curlin'!
Hip, hip, hurray! for the game wi' the stanes;
Hurray for the ring o't,
The roar and the ring o't;
Hurray! Hurray! for the besom and stanes!"*

* * * * *

"*Sir Adam; and brother cuk-cuk-curlers!*" (*stammered Irvie*). "*The 'Hurrah for the r-r-r-r-ring o't. And the r-r-roar and the rir-rir-rir-ring o't. And the nonsense, fif-fif-fif-for the most part, j-j-j-just spoken by the minister'* ('Oh! oh!' *cried Sir Adam*) '*and by the schoolmaster*' ('Canny man! Canny!' *from Dr. Langmuir*) '*in reference t-t-t-t-to his ir-ir-ir-wretched old co-co-co-country, and his new, hard, fif-fif-fif-frost bitten co-co-country here, is-most deplorable!*' (*roaring laughter*). '*I t-t-take the liberty to-to-to-disagree absolutely with McWhirter's d-d-d-d-d-d-d'* ('Canny man,' *from the minister*) '*dogma of work-work-work-ever lal-lal-lal-lasting work!*' ('Hear! hear!' *chuckled Wattfield*).

"Does he not know that one-half of the human family d-d-d-d-d-do all the work that is d-d-d-done in the world, while the other half go idle, ('And mair shame is't!' said Cadenhead); wrongly deprived of their b-b-b-blessed share of it! And iu consequence, cuk-cuk-cuk-causing untold misery and kic-kic-kic-crime throughout the race!" ('Nae doot! uae doot!' sighed Cairnrigg, wagging his head and tapping his snuff mull).

"I will not continue my observations," ('Go on! Go on!' shouted the curlers) 'except to say that I d-d-d-disagree entirely with McWhirter, as t-t-t-to the lil-lil-lil-limited view he has taken of the fif-fif-future of this country. None of you may agree with me. But I believe the time will cuk-cuk-cuk-come when Cauada will be bound up in a Union with the United States of America!' (Uproar, and loud cries of 'Never! never!').

"The uniuor I fif-fif-forecast will be one of all p-p-p-p-people of this continent" ('No! no! Never! never!' cried Foxbar) 'uider one fif-fif-fif-fif-flag, dem it!' ('Stop, laird! stop, man!' pleaded Sir Adam quietly) 'and one go-go-government!' ('Never! God forbid!' cried the minister, turning his spectacles on Irvie). 'And that fif-fif-fif-flag will be composed of the Sta-ta-stars and Strit-a-stripes of the States,' (tremendous uproar) 'to-to-topped with the graud old r-r-r-r-red co-co-cross of St. George!' ('Ha!')."

* * * * *

"We are curlers a', my brither Scots!" (said Blacklockie) 'and, being curlers, we are kuown as true men, drawn to a hair. No chicaner cau skulk about the tee, or find encampment 'round our festal board! Within our walls we proudly boast of freedom to speak our inmost thoughts, subjecting them to keenest scaith and scrutiny, chap-and-lie, and guard-our-shots as best we may, remem'ring the while that we are britthers a', an' britthers to the end!"'

* * * * *

"In a few minutes the three were snugly tucked into the sleigh between the warm buffalo robes. Mary occupied the front seat with her back to the horse, facing Marjorie, who sat beside Erskine. The girls wore coon fur cloaks and mink fur hoods. Erskine was wrapped in a buffalo skin over-coat. With so much fur about them, and with the warm bricks in the straw at their feet, they were very cosy in their little low sleigh.

"By-bye, Mrs. Cairns!" the laughing girls cried, waving their hands. And away they sprang, whizzing and ringing down the brae, over the bridge, and up the Owen Sound Road.

"On they dashed through the drifts, ringing and singing. Past 'Glenallen,' 'Cadenhead,' 'Blacklockie,' 'Rennimuir,' and down the narrow road between the deep pine woods.

"Suddenly a great snarling grey wolf leaped across the track, in front of the horse's head. Prince stopped with a sudden jerk; lowered himself like a leopard about to spring. Then, gripping the bit between his teeth as in a vice of steel, the wild horse sprang away down the narrow white lane like a gust of wind.

"Crouch under the robes, girls!" Erskine said confidently; 'keep still and sit tight!'

"Then he braced himself for a pull. 'Whoa! Prince! Whoa!' he cried. But the horse's teeth remained clamped on the bit. Erskine stiffened himself and pulled again with all his might. But Prince held on. Then, winding the reins tightly around his hands and wrists, the muscular lad put forth all his strength, crying 'Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! boy!' when—good—God—one of the reins suddenly snapped at the bit."

* * * * *

"Erskine's injuries, and the ice application, were exceedingly painful, but no word of complaint came from the patient lad. 'I am afraid you will be tired, Mother, dear,' he said, looking sympathetically into her pale, anxious face, 'waiting up so late for us all to come home.'

"Hush, Ertie; nonsense!" she replied, placing a fresh ice-pack on his shoulder. 'Is that too cold for you, laddie?'

noticing him wince. ‘It’s gy cauld, Mother, as Snuffy Owen would say’ (with a wan smile), ‘but never mind! Keep it going till the doctor comes. I’m glad Prince escaped so well.’ Quintin had just been in to say that the horse ‘Hadna’ a scratch.’

“‘Goodness, Mother!’ cried Mary in distress. ‘This arm’s bleeding awfully!’ She had been removing the covering from the other arm. ‘Oli, that’s just a bruise, girlie!’ he said, raising the injured arm a little to allow her to draw off the sleeve.”

* * * * *

“‘God save us!’ roared the doctor, in a rasping voice, as he lifted the ice-pack from the injured shoulder. ‘Ye’re a’ oot o’ joint, ye thrawn deevil! And what’s this?’ (lifting the other arm). ‘What kind o’ slaughter hoose hae ye bin in, ye good-for-nothing, rovin’ wratch! Oot the road, Whustlewood!’ turning against the anxious laird who was looking over his shoulder. ‘I’ll soon put ye the-gither, ye rampagin’ ne’er-do-weel!’ (flinging off his old, snuff-be-smereed coat).

“‘Rip up some clean rags for me, Mrs. Blair! An’ you, lassie’—turning to Mary—‘what are ye girnin’ at there? Gang and bring me some warm water as quick as yer heels will carry ye! A fine ploy this is ye have a’ been in. A fine ploy tae begin the new year wi’! Are ye no’ ashamed o’ yersel’s?’ he growled.”

* * * * *

“When we left the Farmers’ Inn at midnight, shadows from dense clumps of clouds breaking before the moon, scudded over the fields of snow. A storm seemed brewing.

“Over in the woods we heard the fallen timber snap. And under our feet the frozen board-walk cracked as we passed along the street.

“Out on the highroads the wind puffed and whistled through the woods, sweeping up drifts across our paths.

“Away, in the long swamp, the hungry yowl of a wolf

rang weirdly through the clearing; and, far and near, we heard our collies barking back a challenge from their kennel doors.

"Down the road to Kinntles; over the brae on the Guelph road; along the river side to Garafraxa; and up the Owen Sound road; the powdery snow whirled over the snake fences in silvery screens.

"And by the glint of the moon, as the clouds passed by, we saw, here and there, white curling smoke whiffling away from homestead chimneys, beckoning us home to warm firesides.

"The shepherd and Matha left the inn together, linked arm in arm. 'Man, Matha, wis yon no' grawnd?'

"Dae ye mean Blacklockie?"

"Ay! Hae!"—taking a pinch of snuff and handing his mull to Matha.

"Toot, man! I liked Irvie's speech best. He's a lad, Irvie! Ah-ha-ha-ha! An' what did ye think o' McWhirter?"

"Oh! he wis grand, tae! A'fu' clever!"

* * * * *

"Over at 'Cairnrigg,' in the sma' hours of the morning, Cairns and his wife sat toasting their toes at the warm fire-side, after Sir Adam had retired for the night, and Marjorie had gone to her room.

"I'm thinkin', gude-man, Marjorie and Erskine are gettin' gy chief!" Mrs. Cairns whispered to the laird, significantly.

"'Whew!' puckering his mouth. 'That's the airt o' the wind, is it?'

"'Whisht! She'll hear ye!'

"'A' weel!' sighed the laird, with a lowered voice, resuming his gaze into the fire. 'But what will Sir Adam think o't?' he whispered.

"'Haud yer havers! And dinna mak a fule o' yersel! To hear ye, a body wud think they were meanin' something!'"

PART ONE

*I dearly love, for auld lang syne,
Yon Toon, yon auld stane toon o' mine—
Toon o' my kindred—line on line,
Through a' the years.*

DRUMCRAIGIE

THE PRETTY little Scottish-Canadian settlement of Drumcraigie, nestling in the dip between the braes, and scattered along the rocky cliffs of the brawling Craigie River, was founded early in the nineteenth century by Sir Adam Barclay Drummond and his friends from



SIR ADAM

Scotland. The settlers for the most part were lairds, and sons of lairds, from the shires of Perth, Ayr, Stirling, Lanark, and Aberdeen; and from boot to bonnet, a more cultured, courageous, and handsome lot of stalwarts never left the land o'

oat-cakes. They named their homestead properties in the Canadian backwoods after their lands in the old home, and it was their custom to call each laird by the name of his little woodland estate.

Other Scot farmers and Highland crofters, and many dabblers in trade—joiners, masons, millers, smithies, coopers, weavers, grocers, drapers, saddlers, cobblers, tanners, tailors and tinkers—followed in the wake of the lairds, to fill their several niches in the construction of town and township.

Yon Toon o' Mine

CHAPTER ONE

The Auld Kirk

THE FIRST settlers in Drumcraigie were, for the most part, "Auld Kirk" folk. And their place of worship was a square, tinssteeped stack of wood and mortar, built on the top of the North Brae; and there they worshipped with an old-time reverence that was dignified and immovable.

The faithful folk approached the Kirk in a slow manner, with bowed heads, and passed into their bare pine pews in solemn silence.

There was no unseemly rustling of skirts in the aisles, and no clattering of secular tongues in the lobbies, before or after divine service.

The Kirk on the Drumcraigie hilltop was no house for giddy gossip; but a gathering place for worship and communion with the Most High.

The folk, as becomes religious worshippers, wore their best raiment to the kirk, and it was all paid for before they wore it; and no mortgage cumbered the building that sheltered them in their devotions. They gave cheerfully what they could towards the support of divine ordinances, accounting this a high privilege. And what they offered they did not hide in envelopes, but presented

openly before their neighbours' eyes. No dandily groomed deacons, with roses in their button-holes, pranced up the aisles, pushing pans in the faces o' the folk for their offerings. The simple people dropped the "siller" they gave into a plate at the door, quietly, and without ostentation. There were no pathetic appeals from the pulpit for offerings; for the gathering of money was not the most urgent call from the sacred desk. And the coffer o' the kirk overflowed.

The building was simple, substantial and comfortable; though pulpit and pews were only plain polished wood. There was no "Kist o' whistles" installed at the back o' the kirk, poked at by a professional performer to quench the spirit of united praise. And no minstrel formation of singers were banked behind the minister to warble meaningless nonsense to silent listeners lolling in padded pews. The Drumcraigie folk all sang their songs of praise together! And they sang the words distinctly! And the songs they sang were the old Psalms of David, led by an honest little man in the precentor's desk, who waved his head to and fro to mark the solemn rhythm.

The good, heartsome minister preached the pure gospel. The trimming of sails to catch a popular breeze was an art unknown in his pulpit. No fantastic speculation of the Scripture's meaning was at any time offered; and the doctrine of reward was seldom preached by the sturdy man of God. His constant aim was to build up his

folk with the challenging call to sacrifice! What can you give? Not, what can you get? And the fruit of that preaching is manifest to this day in the stout, honest, helpful life of the folk in this central Scottish-Canadian settlement; and in the honourable, uplifting lives of the Drumcraigie boys scattered in the world.

The minister was a singularly able man. He might have written theological commentaries, or scientific text-books, for the world to read. Or, if the making of money had interested him, he might even have written novels; God help us! Or, if he had tired of his sacred calling, and could have deserted his pulpit without a scruple, he might have gone down into politics, harangued from the platform, and set the silly world aflame with his Celtic fire. But good Doctor Langmuir had neither time nor ambition for these vain things. He was too busy a man from week-end to week-end, visiting his flock, encouraging the strong, soothing the sick, and patting the heads of the bairns in the settlement.

But I recall that the day was often irksome to the boys and girls when the minister came to their homes to question them on the catechism and their other Sunday-school lessons. And it was sometimes irksome to their parents too, when, as often happened, on these occasions, the children stumbled in their tasks. And when intimations of his intended visits were read from the pulpit, the solemn tone of the minister's voice

fell here and there, like a court sentence upon some anxious little ears in family pews. "God willing," he would read, "I will visit, on Tuesday next, the families of Alexander Alerdyce, Robert Garvin, William Clark, and David Smith, on the Bona-Cord Side-line; on Wednesday, the families of James Davidson, David Allen, Robert Powrie and John Muir, on the Owen Sound Road; on Thursday, the families of Peter Rennie, Alexander Gerrie, Warden Shand and Thomas Richardson; and on Friday, the families of Alexander Drysdale, David Black, Alexander Barnet and Thomas Todd, in Garafraxa."

Thus the names would ring out; and, wet or dry, the minister always came.

This old time touch of the minister with the families of his flock is for the most part unknown to-day. These visitations are gone like the wine ("that maketh glad the heart of man.") The Sacramental wine! And with the Cup that passed from hand to hand in memory of the Last Supper of the Lord.

CHAPTER TWO

The Kirk "Star"

AT THE time of the disruption in Scotland there was a stir in the affiliated Kirk in Canada; and many of the congregations here were split up in sympathy with the movement in the old land.

The minister of the Drumcraigie Kirk—then Mr. George Melville—found himself affected by the rupture at home. He expressed himself strongly on the matter; surrendered his snug little manse; gathered up his vestments; and stepped out of the pretty little kirk on the brae. Sir Adam Barclay Drummond, a number of the lairds, and a large part of the congregation followed their minister. Then ensued a wrangle, and a heap o' trouble in the settlement for a while.

But a pulpit without a minister, and a minister without a pulpit, with two sections of a congregation ajar in a little community in the backwoods, was not a condition of things to last long amongst sturdy Scot folk. So steps were at once taken to organize the out-going worshippers into a new congregation.

Kirk divisions in the world are, after all, by no means an unmixed evil. They tend to enkindle a wholesome rivalry, and provide forms, means, and methods better adapted to meet the varied spiritual yearnings of complex humanity. A gen-

eral, united Kirk on this material earth, if possible of achievement, would be of doubtful service, for the best of material combinations does not of necessity ensure the highest spiritual development.

The split in the Auld Kirk in Drumcraigie was a good thing. It stirred up the separated folk, and gave a fresh impulse to devotion throughout the settlement. Lairds who were wont to dawdle about their byres, tapping their snuff mulls, on the Sabbath day, now attended divine worship regularly. And though for a long time the separated folk gloomed at one another when they met on the brae sides, the bitterness passed away, and soon smiles greeted smiles again under the Sabbath sun.

In Presbyterian Kirk economy, meetings of congregations convened for the purpose of calling a minister, electing a precentor, or, indeed, for any other business, are grand occasions for learned debate.

All members on the kirk roll have equal freedom of speech at such meetings. A member may rise in his place and address the moderator at any moment. And if it were not for the opportunity provided by these occasions, the world would never know how much dormant power of eloquent utterance sits drowsing in kirk pews.

In the pews of every congregation there is a leader; one who might be called the "Kirk Star," who is always before the eye o' the folk. This "star" member never misses a meeting. He jinks,

and blinks, and patters about; hops up to the pulpit, and glides down the aisles, tapping the ends of the pews with the tips of his fingers as he passes by. He may only be the tailor of the town, or the cobbler, but the kirk is his on the Sabbath day, and there he shines.

The "Kirk Star" is generally a reader of books, and will come to the business meetings, especially book-primed. The little book of Kirk forms is his inseparable companion. He carries the wee thing secreted, like a dark lantern, in his pocket, and will pull it out, and flash it in the faces o' the folk at an unexpected and inconvenient moment, to confuse and dazzle them with the blue light of Kirk law. To the "star" a meeting to call a minister is a proud moment.

But though Drumcraigie had its "Kirk Star," the "Sunday Shaker" had not insinuated himself into the congregation. He is a product of later times, and, it is to be feared, not yet extinct. We meet him about the doors of the kirk and in the lobbies on Sunday morning. It makes no difference to him if he never saw you before; you cannot escape him. He reaches for you as you are passing; slides his hand into your hand, and shakes you. You feel no joyous warmth in the shake; yet he smiles during the operation. But the smile, you reflect afterwards, is over your shoulder at some other victim he intends to reach for. He sometimes even shakes the hands of two surprised folk at the same moment. And

through his beard he will sweetly tell both, while he shakes them, that "it's a fine day!" When you come to think of it you will remember that the shaker only shakes you on Sundays. He has forgotten all about you when he meets you during the week, and never by any chance puts his hand out to you when you forgather then. And that is why this hollow pretender is called the "Sunday Shaker."

It was not long before two little congregations were firmly established in Drumcraigie. Mr. Melville's followers settled over on the South Brae, in a brand-new stone building, with a bright tin steeple peeping from it through the tree-tops, like a fixed bayonet gleaming in the sun. And henceforth this new kirk on the South Brae was known as the "Free Kirk," the separated folk being known as "Auld Kirkers" and "Free Kirkers."

In reorganizing the Auld Kirk congregation there was a disturbance, caused by the misconduct of a prominent member, that upset the generally accepted opinion throughout the community regarding the character of the offender. As we have remarked, Drumcraigie had no "Sunday Shaker," but the inevitable "star" member was present, and he it was who was the cause of the trouble.

This "star" was the chief deacon of the Kirk, and chanced to be the first pettifogging lawyer of the town. He was a dark, chipper little Scot, who, week in and week out, always appeared in funeral blacks, wearing, in addition, a perennial

smile. His toes, I remember, hooked inward with a peculiar sinister jerk as he walked stealthily about the kirk and town.

Had the trouble occurred in a present day kirk, probably little comment would have disturbed the equanimity of the congregation. But life was not so in old Drumcraigie. The folk there then were not wholly saints; they could square their shoulders and damn one another on occasion; but they abhorred cant. Their purposes were honest; and they reverenced all things sacred, and particularly those appertaining to the kirk. A member adjudged delinquent in these matters, however prominent in kirk and community, would not be tolerated a moment within the shelter of its fold.

It was in calling a new minister to fill the pulpit vacated by Mr. Melville that the trouble arose. Many meetings of the little band were held to discuss one and another of the candidates who had been given a critical hearing. Finally a unanimous agreement was reached after a long debate. The last speech was delivered by deacon Baxter, the "Star" o' the kirk. He had inveighed against the favourite up to the last, but finally closed the discussion by moving that the call to Doctor Langmuir be made unanimous. Peace prevailed. The roll was eagerly signed. And little Baxter moved about among the folk exchanging congratulations, seemingly the happiest man in the congregation. The benediction was then

pronounced by Elder Weems, and the folk passed quietly out into the midnight gloom to wend their peaceful ways homeward.

In due time Doctor Langmuir accepted the call, and was ordained. The pulpit was once more filled; and filled by a man not unworthy to follow the excellent Mr. Melville. And the manse was again occupied by one whose task it would be to emulate the grace and kindly sympathy of the young and beautiful Mrs. Melville. Everything seemed settled and assured. But there was a storm brewing.

A few weeks after the ordination of Doctor Langmuir it transpired that deacon Baxter, the "Star" o' the kirk who so glibly moved to make the call unanimous, had, immediately upon his return home from the meeting, penned the successful candidate an atrociously mean letter. In this he set out, among other things, that "the call was not at all unanimous," and advised the Doctor strongly "not to accept the call."

"I'll open their eyes," he said to himself as he crept about his room rubbing his bony hands together; "I'll surprise them; and show them I've not been in politics for nothing!"

When the folk found out what the crafty creature had done their wrath was 'roused. And Baxter was swept out of their kirk for ever!

"I'll no say, Mr. Moderator," said Elder Weems, from his place at the session meeting held in the vestry to deal with the matter, "that we are tae

judge o' motives. That can verra weel be left tae Mr. Baxter and his Maker. But I wull say that, as far as in us lies, we mun keep the roll o' oor kirk membership free frae a' kinds o' guilt and uncleanness o' this sorry character. And sorry I am tae say it, but say it I must; there can be nae place in this kirk for a worker o' sic deceitfulness!"

CHAPTER THREE

The Two Lairds

DURING the excitement of the moment the tricky deacon was, as might be expected, the subject of strong words of condemnation amongst the members of the congregation when they met, and the folk generally throughout the settlement. Doctor Langmuir "improved" the occasion by giving a long discourse from the pulpit, on the iniquity of double dealing.

Blacklockie and Irvie, two of the prominent lairds of the settlement, who habitually walked home from kirk together up the Owen Sound Road, interchanged some characteristic remarks on this occasion. These two lairds were influential men, firm friends, and near neighbours. Meeting them under their tall silk hats, their hands clasped behind their backs as they walked homeward on the Sabbath day, dissecting the sermon, you were impressed by the importance of the men. Both were scholars, well grounded in knowledge at Scottish schools, whose individuality was unimpaired by their training. In their daily intercourse each had something of value to impart, or he remained silent. Both were members of the kirk, but neither took everything he heard for granted. Each could, at any moment, give a good and emphatic reason for the faith that was

in him, had anyone the daring to enquire; though neither took a leading part in the kirk services. And, like most of the lairds in and about Drum-



"What of the Kirk supported by such cheats? Think of that!"

craigie, neither Blacklockie nor Irvie was a man who could "thole" any sort of sham.

Irvie was a courteous gentleman of the old-fashioned school, who took his snuff and his dram like all the rest of them, and who "demned" things with honest vigor betimes. He spoke with an amusing stammer, frequently interjecting pro-

fane expletives, but he was never known to do an unkind act to a fellow-man. Irvie was loved by "abody".

Blacklockie was a Scot of another kind. A square, strong man; six feet high, and straight as a wall; had a face like a quarry, and a brow like a bit of the Craigie Cliff. A proud man, who had the blood of conquerors in his veins, and who front-faced all men in all circumstances with fearless honesty. In Blacklockie's presence you had to speak and act on the square; and when his deep, vibrant voice thundered, you were apt to listen.

When the two left the kirk door that morning, with their heads drooping forward, they walked together in silence. Turning the corner of the kirk yard without a word, they moved along the side of the newly built dyke surrounding the kirk acre, where already some of their loved ones were laid, and where, by and by, they, too, expected to sleep their last long sleep. Blacklockie lifted his strong head a moment to cast a wistful glance over the dyke at the newly-made grave of his father, the laird of Craighead. Irvie, a little ahead, was moving along apparently in deep thought. His steps were halting, and his eyes were bent seriously on the dusty path. Then, side by side, the two lairds walked without a word until they reached the Owen Sound Road and turned the corner northward. The laird of Irvie was the first to speak, and his words were an explo-

sion; for his impulsive heart was seething. “De-de-de-damnable!” he roared in the wind; “Mo-mo-most de-damnable!” He was thinking of Baxter.

“Ay, the heart of man is evil at the core; the heart of all mankind,” returned Blacklockie; whose thoughts were running in the same direction.

“Yes, Blacklockie, that is q-q-q-quite true!”

Irvie’s heat had dropped a degree or two after the explosion, and he fell into a conversational mood. With level eyes searching the woods about him, his face singularly thoughtful, he continued: “But, dismissing B-B-Baxter from our minds for the moment, I v-v-venture the assertion that not the least of the things we ought to be thankful for in this lil-lil-life, is the quantum of healthful evil that is in our ha-hah-hearts.”

“What!” shouted Blacklockie, stopping suddenly, and flashing his strong eyes at his friend.

“Evil in our ha-ha-hearts from our birth—as the Scripture hath it—is goo-goo-good for us while we are here breeding and battling in this mi-mi-miserable world; or it wouldn’t be there!”

“Where did you learn that doctrine?” Blacklockie growled.

“From acquaintance with myself, Blacklockie,” straightening himself up tensely, “and my outlook on Go-Go-God’s creation! I believe in the la-la-law of Polarity, dem it! Were there no evil in our hearts there would be no good. Glorious ho-ho-hope, too, would be absent from our hearts—the ho-ho-hope that overcomes—if there were no evil

to be delivered from. "The Lol-Lol-Lord did not teach us to pray, I take it, that the evil in our hearts be taken entirely from us; but that we be delivered from its co-co-control! Were our so-so-souls as white as wool, we would be ready fif-fif-for wings. We would be unfit to stem the cross cuk-cuk-currents about us, and do our appointed work in the wo-wo-world. Evil is the savour and spur of lil-lil-life!"

This was a new line of thought to Blacklockie.

"But there would be no cross currents to stem if there was no evil in the world, I'm thinkin'," he replied, taking a pinch of snuff and handing the box to his companion.

"Ah! but do not forget, man. While we are here we are like shuttles in a loom, tossed between goo-goo-good and evil, d-d-d-dem it! We are in the midst of a wh-wh-whirl of cross currents. Cross cuk-cuk-currents that would overwhelm a spotlessly white man; because of the b-b-b-blindness of his purity and his credulous innocence!"

"Hit-chee!" sneezed Blacklockie, giving his bandanna handkerchief a flutter in the breeze.

"B-b-b-but, woe to us, Blacklockie, if we do not k-k-keep the evil we are born with under subjection! That, I take it, is our main b-b-business, d-d-dem it, in this world, if we would come out clean at la-la-last."

"Doubtless," said Blacklockie; "Doubtless!" clasping his hands behind him in an iron grip, and treading the road with a firmer step.

"And I do not hesitate to say," he went on (and Irvie knew by his stiff bearing that there was something dogmatic coming); "Scots though we both be, Irvie, that a devil-controlled Scot is the most dangerous of all men. But" (after a moment's pause), "thank God there are not many of them in the world!"

"Wh-wh-why more dangerous than others?" enquired Irvie, wiping his eyes, for he, too, after taking snuff, had been sneezing in the wind while Blacklockie spoke.

"Because, being a Scot, he is out-and-out! What he does, he does thoroughly! No qualms trouble him! He will be-devil the kirk, and steal from his mother! If you fall into his grip, woe betide you! He will squeeze the last dreg of marrow from your bones, and grind you to fine powder!" Blacklockie's voice was growing hard, and his strong words boomed like the echoes of thunder in a cavern.

"Sanctity on Sunday is his favourite role to gain an end!" he continued. "And, during the week, if you are in his power, he will come up to you with a smiling face, and drain you white. Or behind your back he will sear you with his evil tongue 'till he has scorched you to a cinder! You remember Gall, and the tongue o' him! That wizzen-faced money lender from Aberdeen, who came into our midst and flourished for a while, accumulating farm on farm, filched from honest farmers whom he drained dry!"

"Sc-sc-sc-scoundrel!" hissed Irvie through his teeth, quickening his pace and stamping impatiently in his walk. Irvie well remembered Gall and the ruin the rascal made of many struggling farmers in the country-side.

"But of what avail?" continued Blacklockie. "That scorned wretch shivered at last before true men in the world; and in the end he went down to his grave with a wry face, leaving all he had behind him! Yes! Irvie, I believe an evil Scot is the marrow of them all! And I am wondering," he went on, after a pause, "if that little black Baxter may not turn out to be another Gall of smaller calibre?"

"He may, the r-r-rascal! And I will admit that what you say about the evil Scot may be r-r-right. But while you were speaking I was thinking about another kind of Scot. What of our good friend, William Weems, or your late father, the lal-lalaird of Craighead? His going was 'mair like,' as Dr. Langmuir would say!"

"Ay!" replied Blacklockie solemnly; "Craighead died the death of a good man! He did not leave all he had behind him when he passed away; but took the main thing with him, a pure and upright character, and carried that to the Upper Throne! Ay, ay!" pulling out his snuff-box again, and tapping it on the side; "like many another honest man in the kirk, my father was never heard there. But, let me tell you, Irvie, his true soul had ever the upward look!"

. . . . Hae!" handing his snuff-box to his friend.

"When I think of that man Baxter," rejoined Irvie, taking a pinch and handing the box back to Blacklockie, "I agree with you as to how d-d-demnably some cuk-cuk-cunning scoundrels conceal their nefarious practices under k-k-kirk professions."

"Ay, Irvie! and so it will be 'till the crack of doom. But theirs be the eternal wreck! The wounded, weltering kirk will aye win through!"

"It is certainly the duty of the k-k-kirk to p-p-purge the rir-rir-roll of such vermin!"

"Doubtless! And the kirk, never fear, is stronger when it adopts heroic measures of scouring at times!"

"I agree with you!" answered Irvie vigorously.

"There will always be cheats who will find a means of sneaking into the sacred offices of the sanctuary. But what boots it?" cried Blacklockie vehemently.

"Ay, what boo-boo-boots it? as you say."

"What gain is there in being a deacon; or a brow-beating elder; squeaking the aisles in sacramental boots; if he be a cheat?"

"Ay, what gain? D-d-d-dem!" echoed Irvie, with his irrepressible expletive.

"A cheating farmer, for example, who, to decoy the simple on market day, puts his best fruits and roots and grain in the top of the bag!"

"Or a chi-chi-cheating pettifogger who writes scurrilous letters!"

"Ay! Or a cheating workman who scamps his work! Or a money-lender at twelve per cent! Or a rich man with a gobbler strut, who gains his pelf by crafty schemes of robbery! Or a gambling jobber, juggling stocks!"

"Or a bib-bib-broker who hires his services to the gambling jobber!" added Irvie, eager to confirm the indignation of his companion.

"Ay! Or a politician who reaches power by corrupt purchase, and holds his place by the same means! What gain is there," cried Blacklockie passionately, "to such cheating mountebanks, croaking their prayers in holy garb, even though they fill the coffers o' the kirk with their ungodly gotten gains? . . . Ay! And God save us, man," he roared, (standing back and glowering at Irvie) "what of the kirk supported by such cheats? *Think of that!*"

CHAPTER FOUR

Chief End o' Man

TOM TODD, the laird o' the "Tamaracs," with rivulets of perspiration rolling down his broad, bare, hairy breast, was busy honing his scythe in the hot hay field, when, glancing along the blade, he caught sight of Dr. Langmuir's piebald ambling through the woods.

"Goad! there's the minister! Rin and tell ye'r Mither, Johnnie. Rin roon the back o' the barn, so's he'll no' see ye. Guid help us; he's come sooner than I expecket." So saying, Tom laid down his scythe; and slipped the long blade of it under a heavy green swath at his feet.

The minister had not been expected until later in the day, but Tom's wife, Ann, busy body, was on the alert. "Keekin'" through the window of their log cottage overby, she saw the minister coming. So when Johnnie came running in with his bare, brown, scratched feet; and his towslod hair bursting through the crown of his broken straw hat, he found his mother rushing about the house with a dust cloth in her hand, but and ben, "reddin' up the hoose."

"Get on yer duds, laddies, quick! Dicht yer mooths at the pump! Mercy me! and I hav'na my hair din!" she cried.

To give his wife time to "redd up" Tom cunningly

lingered with the minister at the barn, showing him through the new building raised recently with the help of twenty neighbours. The minister gazed about him overhead, thoughtfully surveying the heavy beams and broad lofts.

"Ay, man, Thomas, but this is fine!" he said, turning round with a genial smile; "and how are the crops coming on?"

"No that bad, Doctor; raether droothy maybe. But we're no far frae rain, I'm thinkin'." And as Tom spoke he moved heavily over to the big doors of the barn, and, lifting the cross-bar that held them together, he proudly swung them open.

From the raised entrance where the two men stood, a green quivering field of shooting grain met their view on the left, toward the maple woods. On the right, away toward the tamarac swamp, long, heavy swaths of newly-mown hay lay in rich rolls, filling the balmy air with delightful fragrance. Swallow birds flitted about the sky. Dense flocks of wild pigeons swept, in triangular clouds, across the stumpy clearing from wood to wood, fleeting shadows tenderly caressing the shimmering fields below. Golden bumble-bees hummed in the air. Glittering butterflies jinked and fluttered from flower to flower. Striped chipmunks, here and there, chattered in the gentle breeze. It was indeed a fat, fresh, and promising prospect over which the minister and the farmer ran their eyes that bright afternoon.

"Man, Thomas, that looks like a full barn in the harvest, if I may judge."

"Ay, but we can never forecast, Doctor!" said Tom as he turned about, shook his head, and scraped the soles of his heavy boots on the new plank floor of the barn. "There are sae mony things can happen. Farming in summer, Doctor, is a guid deal like curling in winter; gey and chancey. Hah! Heh! Heh!"

Both Tom and the Doctor were keen curlers, and Tom's mention of the slippery winter game in the heat of a midsummer day, brought a glad, reminiscent smile into the minister's round, rosy face.

"Weel, we'll awa in," continued the farmer; "the wife and bairns will be waitin'."

And the two of them, Tom leading the way, passed through the side door of the barn, across the cow-yard, through the little picket gate, along the winding gravel walk to the front door of the log cottage, facing the running brook.

In view of the minister's visit, anxious Ann had been drilling her two boys daily in the answer to the first question in the catechism. She knew that the minister always asked little boys and girls, "What is the chief end of man?" And she worried the tired little boys, night after night, with the question and its answer, until their heavy eyes closed in weariness.

At breakfast that morning Tom felt very happy

as he sat at the head of the table, with Ann at the other end, busying herself coaching wee Bobbie in the answer to the first searching question of the catechism.

Thoughtless of his wife's worthy endeavours, ruddy Tom smacked his lips and talked only of the good things on the table; smiling and praising the porridge, the toast, the eggs, and hot tea his wife had just poured for him.

"Haud ye'r havers, Tom!" said Ann, glowering at him (with a gleam of satisfaction in the glower). "Tae hear ye, a body wad think ye're wyme (stomach) was 'the chief end o' man'."

"An' so it is, guid-wife! Ha-Ha-Ha! That is—" (catching a frown on Ann's brow) "in a sense!" And here he giggled softly, and beamed over his little family.

Wee, thoughtful, bright-eyed Bobbie, who sat on a high chair beside his mother, was puzzled. The "chief end o' man," as his mother taught it, was beyond his comprehension; but, having great faith in the wisdom of his father, the boy was much impressed by what Tom said.

After the family had risen from prayer that afternoon, Doctor Langmuir turned to the boys, standing on the right and left of their mother's chair. Leaning forward and laying his soft white hand kindly on Bobbie's golden curls, he said: "Now Bobbie, my bright little mannie, what is the chief end of man?"

"His wyme!"

"Hoot-toot, laddie!" said blushing Tom, pulling out his bandanna.

"Wheest, bairnie; wheest!" whispered Ann, drawing Bobbie tenderly to her knee, whilst she turned a sullen glance at Tom.

The minister's eye twinkled. Turning to the



"Now Bobbie, my bright little mannie. What is the chief end o' man?"

older boy he enquired solemnly; "well, John, my boy, what do you say?"

Johnnie was ashamed of Bobbie and answered with a firm, pert lip; "Man's-chief-end-is-to-enjoy-himself-and-the-glory-of-God-forever!"

"Losh, laddie!" cried Tom, looking sternly at the lad; "what are ye sayin'?"

Johnnie looked about from face to face in surprise. He did not understand the question at all; and had been repeating the answer he gave, over and over to himself night and day. The whole matter was as dark to him as it was to wee Bobbie, but, somehow, he thought his answer had the right ring.

"No, John, lad! You are not quite correct, my man," said the minister kindly. "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever. But," turning a smiling face to the embarrassed parents, "I am not sure that there is not a lesson for us in the innocent answers of the boys. It is most important, of course, that we should keep the body well nourished and in good condition, if we are to work to advantage. But, too often, robust men" (glancing at Tom, who was thoroughly abashed), "while enjoying their food, forget the Great Father who provides all we eat and drink. And I would say also, and with sorrow, that many men seek too earnestly after their own enjoyment, making that the chief end o' their lives. Let us not do this. But let us walk warily, seeking only God's will, and to do those things that will redound to His glory. Now, Mrs. Todd," rising and putting out his open hand kindly, "I must be going."

"Will ye no' stay an' hae a cup o' tea wi' us, Doctor? The kettle's on," said Ann, as she took the minister's hand and looked wistfully up into his kind, round face.

"I thank you very much, but I have to visit

David Black yet, ye ken; and it will be late enough ere I get back to the manse. I am glad to find you all so well here, at the 'Tamaraks.' Good-bye, Mrs. Todd."

"Good-bye, my boys! You'll ken the chief end o' man when I come back again, won't you, laddies?" And the minister (patting the boys' heads) passed out behind shamefaced Tom, who led the way back to the barn, where the piebald 'horse o' the manse', with the unsteady old phaeton behind him, stood waiting for the doctor beside the gate.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Wheest, Laddie!"

THE FIRST bell's ringin', Ann! Ye'll need tae hurry!"

It was Tom Todd calling in at the door of his cottage on Sunday morning. It was a dry, blistering day, toward the end of August. Flies buzzed in the air. The hot sun crinkled the leaves on the maple trees. Nibbling sheep huddled in the shade, at fence corners. Pasturing cattle stood in the running creek, switching their tails. Tom's barn was stuffed to the roof. His heart was filled with content. And, with happy minds, he and his little family were making ready for the kirk.

"Rin and tell ye're faether tae hae patience!" said Ann to wee Bobbie at her side.

Ann was "ben" the room at the time, "fechtin" with a new bonnet Mrs. Piper, the milliner, had sent her the week before. She stood in front of her little looking-glass, tugging and twisting at a "creation" that turned out to be a sad misfit. And the fuming wife became suddenly aflame.

The fields were fruitful this year; so Ann thought she could afford to be fashionable—

"I want the newest, mind!" she said to Mrs. Piper. And what she got was a wide, poked, straw scuttle; wound about with a wealth of piping, red ribbons and blue flowers.

She caught her bonnet at the tip with one hand, pulled it forward and slapped it on the crown with the other hand. She gave the ribbon a twist at her fat throat; but the ill-fitting scuttle provokingly slid back, gaping at the sky.

“Confoond Mrs. Piper and her bonnets!” she cried, jerking the thing off. “I’ll jist carry it in my hand, and set it on my heid at the Kirk door.” With that she brushed out in a sulk to Tom and the boys who were impatiently waiting with the ox-wagon, to wheel them away. (I often wonder if there would be any kirks in the world if there were no new bonnets for women to wear.)

Big Tom had no suspicion of his wife’s trouble. He did not bother himself with her bonnets and “fal-da-rals,” as he called them. He was busy when Ann came out, quieting restless Bill, who was lashing his tail and hooking at the biting flies. Old Dan, the off ox, impervious to the sting of flies, stood stolidly shewing his cud.

The boys had hopped into their seats in the wagon, and were settled down; Bobbie on the front seat, and Johnnie on the seat behind. Tom walked around the tail of the wagon to give Ann a lift over the high hind wheel. It was a big gravid lift of fourteen stone or more. When she was safely up he pulled out his bandanna handkerchief, wiped his wet face, and contentedly said; “Aich wumman, but ye’re growin’!”

He then took the whip, stepped forward, and led the oxen carefully around the corner of the house,

between the old elm stump and the wooden pump, through the gate, into the dusty road.

"Whoa, Bill!" he cried. Then, resting his heavy foot on the big wooden hub of the front wheel, he heaved his bulky body into the wobbly wagon, and took his seat on the stiff cross-board beside Bobbie. Ann sat 'pechin' behind, on a thinner, springier board, beside Johnnie.

And now, Todd o' the "Tamaracs" waved his big whip gently across the broad backs of the fat oxen, and away they shouldered down the crooked trail between trees and stumps, dragging their heavy legs through the dusty road.

"Let me d'ive, Pa!" said Bobbie after a while, snuggling up to his father. Big Tom gave wee Bobbie the whip. The little fellow gripped the handle of it with both hands, and tried to swing the lash across the oxen's haunches, shouting in his baby voice, "Zgee, Dan, Zgee! What for will they no' Zgee, Pa?"

"The sleepy kye ken better, laddie. They ken better."

"What do the sleepy kye ken? Zgee, Bill! Zgee!" lashing at them.

The dour oxen paid no attention whatever to Bobbie, but kept slowly delving along.

"They ken they're gawn tae kirk worship, I'm thinkin'," said Tom, chuckling to himself and scratching his head. (Tom always thought of a comfortable slumber in the kirk when anything sleepy was mentioned.)

“Do kye wortship, Pa?”

“Ay, in their ain wy, laddie; in their ain wy!”

“No’ in the kirk, Pa?”

Bobbie was getting curious, and although big fat Todd was ever patient with his wee bright bairnie, the persistent enquiries became tedious.

“Speir ye’r mither, bairnie. Speir ye’r mither!” he said, taking the whip from Bobbie to guide the oxen through a narrow twist between the stumps. “Gee, Dan; Gee! Haw, now; Haw!” he cried, waving the whip from right to left.

“Are there ony sleepy kye in the kirk, Ma?” asked Bobbie, turning to his mother.

The wagon wheels were now curling over some high stump roots, frightening and irritating Ann.

“Ay! a gy wheen, I’m thinkin’!” she snapped peevishly. “Aich, Tom; can ye no’ be more careful?” she called to her husband.

“Canny, Bill, Canny!” said Tom, smiling at the oxen.

Ann’s wry face and cross manner quenched Bobbie for a time, and he cuddled close up to his good-natured father. He sat silent for a while, open-eyed, dreaming some dreams in the flying dust.

“What like are whales, Pa?” he asked at length, looking up into Tom’s perspiring face. He was thinking of the story of Jonah that Tom had read to the family that morning.

“Great big fish, laddie!”

“As big . . . As big—” spreading out his little arms; “As big as Bill, or Dan?”

"Ay, bigger, bairnie; bigger!"

"Oh! as big—," looking about him and seeing Brown's little cow-byre over the way, "as big as a barn, Pa?"

Tom glanced through the tail of his eye at Brown's modest byre and thought proudly of his own big new barn.

"Far bigger than that bit biggin' laddie! Haw, Bill, Haw!"

Busy Bobbie sat dreaming awhile, then commenced his questioning again;

"What for did the whale swallow Jonah, Pa?"

"It was Goad's wull, my laddie; Goad's wull."

"What for?"

"Tae punish him for his sins, bairnie."

"What sins?"

"Mony kinds o' sins, laddie."

Bobbie thought deeply for some time.

"Was the whale wicked to swallow up Jonah, Pa?"

"Ay, I'll no' say but that it was a kind o' wickedness, Bobbie! But it was Jonah that Goad was visitin' with His divine wrath, when the great fish swallowed him up." Bobby now remained quiet for some time.

"Wis Goad angry at the whale, Pa?" he resumed.

"I'll no' say, laddie; I'll no' say!"

"Did the whale spoo up Jonah, Pa?"

"Ay, after three days, bairnie; after three days . . . Haw, Dan; haw!"

"Oh my!" sighed Bobby, gripping his waist

with his little hands and turning a woebegone face to his father. “I was awfu’ sick, once!”

“Ay, laddie, but ye’re no’ sick the noo, are ye?” glowering down with a fatherly tenderness on the little laddie.

“No!” Bobbie answered reflectively; “But I was thinkin’ o’ Jonah in the whale’s belly. Oh, my!” he sighed.

“Ay, ay, laddie!” patting him on the head; “it’s a sickenin’ thought, to be sure; to be three days and three nachts in the wyme o’ a whale. Gee, Bill; Gee! A painfu’ punishment, my laddie. But it was Goad’s wull. An’ His wull maun aye be din, ye ken. Aich, ay!”

Bobbie had a vivid remembrance of the day when he filled himself with green gooseberries from the bush in the corner of the garden. His serious little face was the picture of pain; his chubby fingers still gripped his sides. And, from the fulness of his sympathetic young heart, he cried out aloud, and mournfully: *“Did Jonah give the whale a pain Pa?”*

“Wheest, bairnie; wheest!” cried startled Tom in alarm, for they had now reached the end of their journey; “The folk’ll hear ye! Weel! here we are, wumman. Haw, Dan; haw!” And the dusty team, with its little load, wheeled into the driving shed at the Farmers’ Inn as the second call of the little kirk bell began to tinkle in the tin steeple.

“Bring the oxen’s grass, Johnnie!” said Tom in a subdued voice, and the bundle of hay that had

been stored in the wagon before they left home was brought out.

They were now grouped beside the wagon, under the shed. There was a row of other horse and ox teams lined up before the long wooden trough in the shed. Tom, handing Johnnie a wisp of hay from the bundle, said; "Here! Dicht the dust off ye'r mither's shawl, laddie."

After pushing the fodder down in front of the oxen's heads, Tom took off his coat, gave it a vigorous shake, pulled it on again and said: "A-weel, we're no' that late, I'm thinkin'."

The family then crossed the street and made their way around Watt's Corner, up the brae side, to the Auld Kirk.

Bobbie noticed his mother holding her bonnet; tightly gripping it under her chin, as they climbed the brae; and as they entered the Kirk door he whispered; "What for will ye'r new bonnet no' bide on, Ma?"

"Wheest, laddie; wheest!"

Big Tom edged his way through the Kirk door, and, instead of gracefully following, led the little family procession rudely up the aisle to their pew in the middle of the kirk. When they were all in, Tom, giving his trousers a hitch, and squeezing himself down into the far end of the seat, pulled out his bandanna and wiped his brow. Ann lowered herself in a soft heap at the other end of the pew, next the aisle, and bowed her head.

Through the greater part of the minister's long

sermon, divided into many sections, and inter-sections, Tom slept, and dreamed. He dreamed of his crops—of his kye—above all of his curling in winter. He was on the ice just then. “Sweep it! Sweep it! Soop, ye deevil!” Ann heard his faint cry and nudged Johnnie; Johnnie nudged Bobbie, and Bobbie nudged his father, who sat up and studiously turned a leaf in his Bible. A moment or two later Tom fell back again into a sound sleep.

And, whilst he slept, the minister’s preaching droned in his ears like the murmur of the brook below his new barn. Toward the close of the sermon the drone grew louder to Tom. Words formed themselves in his mind, and some sort of meaning began to attach itself to the words of the preacher; “Rouse ye then, brethren, and work while it is yet day, for the night cometh when no man can work!” But the words were not the minister’s in Tom’s hazy mind. It was Ann he heard, urging him to get the crops in before the night fell. So, stretching his big angular arms to their full length, he gurgled loudly through a chopping yawn, “Ay-ay, wumman; I’ll dae-ma-best; I’ll dae-ma-best!” This gave the kirk a terrible shock. The startled minister gazed down on the now thoroughly awakened Tom with astonishment. Ann’s head came ’round with a sudden jerk; and her flaring bonnet flew off into Mrs. Shand’s lap behind. “Mercy me!” she hissed, clutching the air. Johnnie jumped. Solemn wee

Bobbie hitched himself closer to his big father, looked anxiously up into his face, and whispered in tones that could be heard halfway across the sacred building, "What for did ye waken up all the congelation, Pa?" "Wheest, laddie; wheest!" whispered the embarrassed Tom, patting Bobbie's hand.

And when the little questioner saw Mrs. Shand helping to settle the gaudy bonnet back on Ann's head, he again turned his round blue eyes up to his father, and timidly asked: "What for will Ma's new bonnet no' bide on, Pa?"

"For Goad's sake, laddie, wheest!"

CHAPTER SIX

After Many Years

THIRTY years later I met wee Bobbie Todd, as a man—a big, brown, burly tyke of a fellow, turning the scales at nearly three hundred pounds.

He was clad in a suit of new corduroy, with deep flapped pockets. His thick-soled boots clanked like heavy wooden pattens as he walked. His leather leggings were new, brown, and bright; and buttoned tightly about his fat calves. Ruddy health spoke from every movement, and his face wore a continual smile, that revealed a double row of beautiful pearly teeth. He was the perfect embodiment of self-contentment, confidence, and comfort.

It was in the rotunda of the "Davie House," at Toronto, on a cool evening in the month of October, that I met him. We sat in neighbouring chairs at the time, wedged between their wooden arms, enjoying the peace with the world that comes to a man after a hearty dinner. My neighbour sat pondering and picking his teeth, and after awhile hitched over toward me. I felt like talking with the odd-looking countryman, so I leant over and remarked, through a blue puff of smoke from my briar, that "they really give a well-cooked dinner at the 'Davie'!"

"Ay! But, gosh, man!" turning quickly and dropping the leg that crossed his knee; "hoo the deevil can ony man eat three quarter o' a dollar's worth at ae sittin'? Tell me that!"

A sudden glance at the honest face, and bright, round sparkling eyes of the man, showed me that, though he had enjoyed his dinner, he was figuring out in his mind the market value of it all; the boiled beef, the three or four potatoes, the cabbage, the slice of beet, the carrots, the turnip, the salt, the pepper, the bread, the bit o' butter, the two cups of coffee, the apple dumpling, and the currant pie. I seemed to read in his open face that he had valued the whole at probably not more than twenty-three cents.

"I presume you are a stranger in Toronto?" I asked, changing the subject.

"Weel," he replied, crossing his legs again, "A'm no what you can ca' an entire stranger. I read the *Globe* and ken aboot ye; but this is my first veesit. I'm doon wi' some steers. I'm frae Drumcraigie. Ye ken Drumcraigie?" (I nodded.)

"Todd's ma name. They ca' me 'Bob' at hame. I hae a farm oot-by yonder aboot a mile frae the river. My faither settled on't in '45. I was born and brought up there. Got Jean Struthers, a neighbour's lassie, for ma wife. And we have four bairns—twa girlies an' twa boys. Faither lives wi' us, but isna fit for muckle noo—jist dawdles aboot the farm in summer, pooin' weeds

an' sic like. In winter he spends maist o' his time wi' the curlers. Are you a curler?"

"No!" I said, "I never had a chance to enjoy the roaring game, I am sorry to say."

"Man, man!" (in a tone of lofty pity) "Ye dinna ken what ye'r missin'! We a' curl in yon toon o' mine, auld and young. Weel! as I was tellin' ye, I cam doon wi' some steers. The market nearby is naething to brag o', and the wife thought I ought to gie Toronto a try. So I whuppit a wheen stirks inta twa cars. An' I didna dae sae bad wi' them! Ha! Ha! I maun say that! He! He!" he chuckled. "And, forby, I hae a kizzen here that my wife wants me tae see. His faether and mine cam oot thegither in '45. His faether cam tae see us at the "Tamaracs," lang syne, when I was a bairn. (We ca' oor place the "Tamaraks" ye ken.) I hae never seen his son, Alec. And the wife thocht it aboot time we should forgather. So I maunna go back without seein' him. Though I would raether no be bothered for my pairt, He! He! He!" tipping up his hat, scratching his bushy head, and chuckling over some funny gossip at home before he left, about his rich cousin in Toronto.

"Aw! Deuced queer! Deuced quee-ar country chap that, don-cher-know!" remarked a young dandy, swaggering past with a monocle in his eye, nudging a giggling companion at his side. Bob was amused.

"Whatna kind o' craters are thae?" he asked,

with a subdued laugh, as the two dandies strutted up to Davie's counter and turned the leaves of the guests' book.

"Clerks from the bank," I replied.

"Guid Goad!" giggling to himself. "What gran craw-scarers the two o' them wad mak cocked in the middle o' my corn patch. Hah! Hah! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" he laughed, with a jolly laughter that rang through the room.

"Mr. Todd! Mr. Todd! Mr. Robert Todd!" cried a little page boy, dodging out and in among the groups of men in the tobacco-smoke gloom.

"Will that be me he wants, think ye? Here! laddie!"

"Are you Mr. Todd? Mr. Robert Todd from Drumcraigie?" enquired the boy.

"Ay!" said Bob eagerly.

"Well. You're wanted at the telephone."

"What for?"

"Some one wants to speak to you."

Mr. Davie, at the desk, noticing Bob's indecision, twiddled his fingers at him. Bob rose, pushed the chair off his fat hips, and lurched over to the desk.

"Some one wants to speak to you at the telephone," said Davie quietly. "Here, Tommie, take Mr. Todd to the telephone, and show him how to use the instrument."

"Ay, laddie," said Bob, placing his broad palm on Tommie's head as the two went off together; "I dinna understand' thae new-fangled thingies!"

Tommie handed Bob the receiver and told him to "call into the instrument, and whoever wanted him would answer."

"Ay, ay!" said Bob, poking the small end of the receiver into the transmitter.

"Not that way!" said Tommie, taking the thing from him.

"What wy, then?" looking down at smiling Tommie.

"Put this to your ear, like this, and listen," said Tommie. "Then call into that," pointing to the transmitter.

"Oh, that's it, is't! A' weel!" Then facing the wall with his broad back to the amused audience in the room, the receiver to his ear and his mouth close to the transmitter, Bob gave a shout that could be heard across a ten acre field. "*Hie!*"

"Not so loud! Not so loud!" came a thin squeaky voice over the wire. "Is this Robert Todd from Drumcraigie?"

"Ay! Is that my kizzen Alec Todd speakin'?"

"Yes! I accidently heard that you were in the city, and Mrs. Todd would be very pleased if you could make it convenient to call on us before you return home."

"Dod, man! I was just thinkin' aboot ye! And intendin' to find ye oot in the mornin'," cried Bob. "What's that? "The nicht did ye say? Hoo far is't? Ay! Ay! The street cars! Na, na! Nae street cars for me, wi' their thripenny-bits. I can walk it!"

Listening again to his cousin, who tried to explain that, though partially deaf, he could hear fairly well over the telephone, Bob broke in with: "Ay! It's maist astonishin' hoo I can hear ye, tae. Sae far awa'! What will they be inventin' next? A' weel! I'll come over an' see ye at aince! Eh! what's that? 'Guid bye!' did ye say? Oh! that's it, is't. A' weel! I dinna ken the wy o't yet! A' richt! A' richt! I'll be wi' ye in a wee!"

"Here, laddie!" he said, turning round. "Whaur dae ye pit this bit horn thingie?" dangling the receiver in his hand. But Tommie had gone.

"Hang it over the hook," said Davie from his desk, looking back over his shoulder.

Bob looked about and saw a coat hook on the wall close by. He hung the receiver on that and walked over to Davie.

"Man, but thae tellin-phones beat a'!" he said, wiping his brow. "That was my kizzen Alec. And he wants me up the nicht, richt or wrang. So I maun awa'. Ye needna bide up for me. I'll maybe stay a wee bit late. And I can knock when I come."

"Oh, we keep open all night!" said Davie, smiling.

"Dae ye?" returned Bob in astonishment; "A' weel, that'll be handy. But maybe I'll no be that late." And with that he shouldered his way through the amused crowd, out through the side-door, down the steps, and swung away up the

dimly lighted street toward the house of his cousin Alexander Todd in John Street.

Under the meagre light of a flickering gas lamp at the corner of King and John Streets, Bob encountered a policeman, a big man, about his own size.

"Can ye tell me whauraboot I am?" asked Bob, touching the officer on the shoulder.

"Phwat?" shouted the bobbie, facing about.

"I hae kind a lost ma bearings," said Bob. "I'm seeking John Street," he continued, peering into the gloom.

"Be jabers, and you're standing forninst it this blessed minute. There it is!" said the policeman, pointing up the street.

"Maybe ye can tell me aboot whaur one hundred an' fower is situate?" said Bob.

"Is it wan hundred and four you're afther?" turning around and looking up the dark street; "begorra! I think it's beyond Queen Street you will have to be going. Is it Todd's place you'll be afther goin' to?" he asked.

"Ay, Alec Todd!"

"Alec, is it? 'Slippery' Todd is all the name I knows him by. Deef he is too, sure! Deef as a stone wa-all—sometimes!" casting a cunning glance at Bob.

"What for dae they ca' him 'Slippery'?" asked Bob.

"Be-dam'd if I know!" shaking his head and shuffling the soles of his feet on the hard ground.

"anyhow, it's 'Slippery' is the na-ame they have given him as long as I've been on this blessed beat."

"A' weel, I maun awa' an' see him," said Bob, stepping away into the darkness.

"Sure!" replied the bobbie, moving across the corner; "about ten dures beyant, when you are fornínst Queen Street!" he shouted over his shoulder after vanishing Bob.

"Ay! Ay!" answered Bob from the gloom.

CHAPTER SEVEN

"Whaur's Ma Hat?"

OFTEN the smallest incidents in this world shape our lives. A whiff of wind at the corner of the street turns us in a new direction where we meet a runaway team, and, by a quick dash, we are able to save an infant from certain death. We are one minute late for a train that afterwards goes over an embankment, hurling hundreds to destruction. An overheard word falling on our ears on 'Change, gives us the key to a fortune. The smile of a passing woman lures us to ruin. A whisper in our ear saves us.

So Bob, hearing that his cousin was known to the police as "Slippery Todd," began to ponder. "There's something wrang," he said to himself. "I maun be on ma gaird. A man's no' ca'ed 'Slippery' for naethin'! Noo, whan I think o't, I've heard o' some queer gawns on o' Alec—failin' at this, and failin' at that; burnin's oot, an' sic-like. A' weel, we'll see. I'll let on no' tae ken onything, an' listen."

The strong, safe, successful Scot knows how, and when, to "let on he kens naethin'" better than any other in the world. Hence his success, the world over. The trick provides the Scot with an abundance of secret fun, and puts the evil designer into a state of mental confusion. And Bob Todd,

like his father before him, was a strong, canny, successful Scot.

"Goad, that's a big hoose!" he said to himself, stopping before number 104, and gazing up at its front. "Solid brick; stane steps; and shutters nae less. An' a tower on top. Guid help us!"

Mounting the steps, Bob knocked loudly on a panel of the heavy door with his knuckles, ignoring the brass knocker before his face, and the bell-pull in the brick wall. He repeated the knock, but no one answered. "What the deil's the metter?" he muttered, stepping back, looking up at the windows, and noticing that the place was ablaze with light. Going back again he gave the door another long tat-tat-tat-tat. Then there was a shuffling in the hall, the bolts were drawn, the key turned, and the door swung open, revealing a little red-nosed Irish serving-man.

"Is this Alec Todd's place?" enquired Bob.

"It is that same, sur! And what is it you'll be afther wanting, if ye plaze?"

"I'm Alec's kizzen, come tae see him."

"I beg your honor's pardon. Come in, sur! Come in. The master tould me ye wir expected. But I were afther takin' ye fur another man. Come roight in, sur!" And little Pat pattered away into the deep, wide hall, with Bob lumbering after him.

Bob was dazzled by the glitter of the place. And when he glimpsed a life-sized, nude woman (in plaster) standing in a corner of the hall, he gave

a sudden lurch, the rug under his feet slid on the polished floor, and down he went on the broad of his back. The heavy thud shook the house, and Mrs. Todd came hurrying out, Alec following.

Like many another vulgar man, rich in this world’s goods, Alec Todd thought he ought to be admired for the gear he had gathered; and, weak man, the display of his belongings, particularly to relatives who happened in upon him, was his chief delight. It was then he assumed his most important air, and bored his visitor with a weary enumeration and detailed valuation of his things.

In business Alec was a tailor’s furnisher. A dealer—wholesale—in threads, pins, needles, collars, ties, buttons, and trimmings. He had trailed through the country for years, pack on back, peddling these trifling necessities to small tailors in towns and villages.

But now he had a warehouse in Front Street, employed a number of men, and supplied the tailors by express, from Kingston to Sandwich. He was known in the trade as “Slippery Todd,” and more than once he had been caught defrauding the Customs. In selling his wares, however, he found it policy to be honest with his customers, and treated them well so long as they prospered and paid their bills regularly. An unfortunate customer, falling behind in his settlements, he would squeeze to the wall with fiendish delight. His methods, consequently, made him comparatively

rich within a few years, and, as a matter of course, he felt he ought to line up with the first folk on the street.

"I'll show them!" he would say to himself, as he passed their doors with tightened lips. So he bought a fine house in the fashionable quarter; and bought pictures, and diamonds, too—silly man!—for himself and the wife of him. He agonized to cut a swath, did this smart Alec; but nobody of any note seemed to notice him. He struggled to make friends, but was left severely alone. To be sure, his wife's temperament was a handicap to successful hospitality. Alec had picked her up when he trudged the country with his pack. She was but a slip of an Irish serving girl at the time, not long from the Emerald Isle. But a right good wife she made for Alec. She kept his house in perfect order, cooked his meals well, starched his shirts, polished, dusted, brushed, till everything about the house glittered. But alas! when she opened her mouth her many sterling qualities were forgotten. Alec ruled in his warehouse; but at home his scowling wife gripped the reins. They had no family, and, in consequence, had a never ending succession of tiffs. On this particular evening, just before Bob's arrival, they had had one of their periodic tussles. Alec had begun to twist sofas and chairs about the room for better effect. She had as persistently twisted them back to their places. So, when Bob's coming had been signalled, man and wife were sitting

apart, dressed in their best, glowering sulkily at the blazing fire, and glancing from time to time with admiration at the glittering rings on their plebeian fingers.

“Guid Goad! Hae ye made a curling rink o’ yer hoose?” cried Bob, rising to his knees and sliding the broad palm of his hand curiously back and forth on the highly polished floor.

“Dear me! what’s happened?” squeaked Alec from behind his staring wife.

“Are you my kizzen Alec Todd?” asked Bob (now on his feet with his hand outstretched in greeting). He could hardly conceal his disappointment at the insignificant appearance of the stumpy little man coming toward him from behind his tall, thin wife.

Alec looked timidly up into the burly, open face of his blooming cousin from the country. And a tremor passed across his weak face as smiling Bob gripped his hand.

“Ah! Hem!” he chirped as cheerfully as he could; “you are my cousin Robert Todd I believe? I am glad to see you. This is my wife,” giving the limp hand he took from Bob’s hard palm a wave toward his solemn spouse.

Bob took her bony hand and held it gently for a moment. “You’re no’ Scotch?” he enquired tenderly, looking good-naturedly into her long, lean face.

“No! thanks be to God I’m not! It is Irish I am; and proud of it!” she snapped. “And I wish

I was in the good green Isle this blessed minute," frowning at Alec.

"Come forrit, Mr. Todd," she said. "In forninst the fire; and warm yourself," pushing a big leather easy chair toward the hearth. "It is deef my man is; almost as deef as a grave stone; an' you'll have to speak out for him to hear ye." She was poking the coal fire vigorously at the time. "There now!" as she hung up the poker and turned to Bob, "make yoursilf comfortable till I goes and makes ye a cup of tay."

"Dinna fash, wumman!" cried Bob, "I hae just finished my dennar at the Davie, and couldna' tak a thing."

But by this time Mrs. Todd was through the swinging kitchen door.

"Mrs. Todd will not be denied, Robert. I may call you Robert, I hope, being cousins?" said Alec.

"Ay, Ay!" murmured Bob; but Alec did not hear.

"We shall have our cup of tea by and by," continued Alec, letting himself slowly down into his leather chair at the opposite side of the fire. "And how are all my kinsfolk in Drumcraigie?" he went on, bringing the tips of his short fingers together. "I have not had the pleasure of making any of your acquaintances in Drumcraigie," (glancing around proudly, with an air of dignified superiority) "either by visiting or receiving visits; and I take it as a very great kindness that you had it in your mind to call on me on your present visit

to our flourishing city. So much of my time is taken up with affairs here, that I fear you have been neglected. But I trust I may find time, ere long, to run up and have a look at you in the bush.”

He patted the points of his stubby fingers complacently as he spoke. Bob listened in silence, making an amused study of his consequential little city cousin.

“You did not tell me how you left all your family at home,” continued Alec, his eyes wandering admiringly around his room.

“You didna gie me a chance! I was waitin’ till you stopped yer bletherin!” Bob muttered in a low voice.

“They’re a’ weel!” he shouted. And noticing that his cousin seemed anxious to make a brilliant impression on his country relative, Bob commenced to humor him.

“Man, but you’ve got a gran’ place here!” he roared, waving his great arms about him.

“Yes, Robert; I am frequently complimented upon my collection,” running his eyes over the ghastly gathering of chromos, photographs, prints, and paintings, that plastered his walls.

“Ay, but they’re gran’!” said Bob gazing around. “Whatna picture is that?” pointing to a heavily-framed chromo of a female figure at the end of the room.

“Ah!” rising from their chairs and approaching the picture, “that’s a ‘Turner’!” Alec answered proudly.

"A what?"

"A Turner!"

Bob lumbered over to look at it closely, then he peeked behind the gilt frame. "Hoo dis't turn?" he enquired. Alec did not hear him.

"Hoo dae ye turn it?" cried Bob into Alec's cocked ear.

"You misunderstand, Robert. Turner is the name of the painter of the picture. He! He! He!"

"Oh! that's it, is't? And what's the name o' the lassie?"

"No name! Merely a figure study. An ideal of the artist's."

"Huh! I dinna care for ony kind o' idils," said Bob, turning away. "An' wha's this?" looking suddenly up at an enlarged photograph over the mantle.

"That, Robert, is a portrait of John A. Macdonald!" replied Alec, stoutly.

"What! Is that really John A.? Well! well! I often thought I'd like tae see the man!" Bob stood smiling and peering up at the Tory leader. "Man, Alec!" he exclaimed. "he's nae very muckle tae look at! But he's a lad! Ha! Ha! Ha! We hav'na muckle use for John A. in oor pairt! We maistly agree with George Brown! Are you a Tory?" he asked suddenly.

"Well," replied Alec, with thumbs in his waist-coat armholes, twiddling his fingers, "I would not be frank with you, Robert, if I were to say to you that I am not sorry. I am sorry—sorry that you

country people are so politically dense. The country is only safe in the hands of the Tory party, Robert! And I must say that John A. Macdonald is a marvel of a leader. With Brown and his hypocritical following, we would all soon go to the dogs!"

"I didna ask ye if ye were sorry, man," said Bob, loudly; "I was only askin' if ye were a Tory?"

"Oh! Ah! Em! This infirmity leads me into many a mess," patting his ears. "Yes! yes! I am a Tory. And if you were in my business, employing as many men as I do, and the Government were ready to recognize your influence with your men in a substantial way, you would be a Tory too, Robert!" (Bob frowned). "It's bread and butter to me," Alec continued, "and that, I suppose, is what we are all after in this world, eh?" (showing his yellow teeth).

"Ay! but ye maun get yer bread an' butter honestly, Alec! Ye maun get it honestly!" (giving his cousin a significant look).

"Pooh! As for that, my bread and butter comes to me as honestly as most people's, I believe. And I must have you understand, Robert," he went on (losing control of himself) "that I do not care to be spoken to in that tone while you are partaking of the hospitality of my house, Sir!" (Bob looked at him with disgust.)

"Calm yoursel, my little mannie!" he said, warming up and laying his brawny hand on Alec's shoulder; "I had ma suspicions. But I didna ken

I was sae soon tae find oot the rotten spot in yer character! Let me tell ye, freend; that there are ither important things tae be soucht after while ye are in this world, ma man, forby addin' to the profit o' yer preens and needles by makin' yersel' a paity to ony political hocus-pocus wi' ony political party!" (glaring down with contempt at his little tainted cousin, and giving him a sudden push). "And daum the hospitality o' your hoose!" he cried. Then, striding angrily to the door, "Whaur's ma hat?" he roared. With hat in hand, he then banged out of the house, and returned, growling, to the "Davie."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Gibbie Can Wait

GUID morning, doctor!" cried William Weems. Doctor Muckle, who was coming across the bridge, stopped when he heard the cheery voice, and stood lowering at the kindly old elder approaching. He made no reply to the greeting, until William came within a couple of yards and stood before him, smiling into the doctor's bleared face.

"Well!" rasped the doctor in his grating voice, "are ye no' ashamed o' yoursel'? Ye auld decrepit, deein' dotteral; staggerin' a' ower the countryside an' pokin' yer lang nose into abody's troubles! Can ye no' bide at hame an' gie yer auld buckled banes a rest, an' let younger folk help whar help's needed? Ye dour auld deevil!"

"Hoot, toot, Doctor! I'm nane the waur!" Giving his bent shoulders a hitch and shuffling his feet about.

"Nane the waur!" croaked the doctor. "Dinna tell me ye'r nane the waur!" (looking the cripple up and down). "I tell ye, ye'r gaun doon! Ye crooked scarecrow! And I'll hae ye on ma hands yet if ye dinna gie up this work! Ye stupid, auld, snotherin' stameral!"

William was taking a pinch of snuff from his mull

at the time. "Hae!" he said, holding out the open mull to the crusty doctor.

The doctor put his long finger and thumb down into the mouth of it and helped himself. "Ga



"Ga hame wi' yet"

hame wi' ye!" he growled. Then he turned away, and pushed the snuff into his hot nostrils.

William called after him, "Hoo's Geordie Mc-Crimmon's wife comin' on, doctor?"

"Comin' on!" (turning half round, with a frown). "She's no' comin' on. She's deid! She died an hour syne!"

"Losh keep us a'!" cried William, raising his arms. "Why did ye no' tell me? Puir Geordie!" And with that the old shepherd turned himself away from the doctor, and hurried with the best speed he could down the river brink towards the house of grief.

William Weems was everybody's friend when a friendly hand was needed in the settlement. Old and young were drawn to him whenever they saw him approaching. The men and women called him "William," though often he was referred to as "the shepherd," for most of his life before he came to Canada he had herded sheep on the Grampian Hills.

He was now over three score and ten years of age, and sorely doubled and crumpled with rheumatism. But there was a time when, as a young man six feet high in his stockings, he could toss the caber, put the shoulder stone, and throw the hammer, farther than any other man on the hill-side. And to-day he was still able to show the boys how to use their muscles to the best advantage in these exercises.

William was a busy old man; for, along with all his other cares, he was the dependable elder of the Auld Kirk session. All questions there were settled without friction by the wisdom of William. He was the treasurer of the kirk, and handled the money

alone, with a sort of sacred stealth. The vestry was not the meeting place, after service, of a gossiping coterie of committee-men, counting contributors' coin as it clinked on the table.

The shepherd slipped the "siller" quietly into his bandanna handkerchief, made a knot on it, and carried it dangling home, to be counted and recorded on Monday morning. For it would have been counted a profane thing, and unseemly in the sight of Drumcraigie, to count siller on the Sabbath Day. It was never done in the time of William Weems.

The shepherd was also the trusted medium of the busy, hard-working lairds of the settlement, through whom their kindly help was dispensed all over the countryside. Poor himself, William knew how to sympathize with those in distress, or in money straits. Night and day the old man struggled through the woods from place to place, lending a helping hand wherever there was want or suffering. When he called on any of the lairds for supplies, contributions were given into his hands without enquiry as to who the folk were who stood in need.

"I'll be wantin' ten shillings frae ye in the mornin', Blacklockie!" he would say, and the money would be lying on the table for him at the time appointed. If he should chance to overlook any of the folk who were able to contribute, the offence was a serious one, for their Scottish pride would not

let them stand for that. So the worthy shepherd had to be impartial in his requests for help.

* * * * *

"Whaur ye gawn wi' Bess?" cried William from his cottage door.

"Oh, William, man, I'm beat! I never thought it would come to this!" replied one-armed John, pulling at a bit of rope looped over the crumpled horns of his old milch-cow.

"Read that!" he added in a broken voice, handing William a sheet of blue paper from his pocket.

"Stand, Bess!"

While William read, John hung his head, and wiped the moisture from his eyes with the sleeve of his blue smock. The two men, standing there in the gloaming of a long day, beside the placid old cow, would have made a fitting subject for a painter.

"Guid save us, John; why did ye no' tell me aboot this?"

"I might hae telt," replied John in a crackling voice, "but ye ken hoo sweart the wife is to let on, when we're in trouble." And the big man broke down, and sobbed like a child.

It appeared that John—who lost his arm at a threshing bee the year before—had fallen sadly into debt. Notwithstanding the thrift of his saving, slaving wife, and all the work he could do with his one strong arm himself, he was forced at

last to borrow money to keep the wolf from the door.

Scot-like, the loan was negotiated secretly; three pounds for three months from lawyer Baxter, on the security of their main support, their good cow Bess.

The loan bore interest at twelve per cent. It was now a month past due; there was no money to meet it, and Baxter insisted upon immediate payment, or "delivery of the cow." With sore hearts, therefore, John Cavan and his wife had that night decided to part with their cherished old milker.

The shepherd was aroused. "Bring that coo intae my byre!" he cried. "Here, Willie!" calling to his son at the back door, "take Bess in an' gie her a bit o' grass. Noo, John, awa' back hame! An' haud yer tongue! And I'll see what can be done aboot this!"

After John had gone, William went into his little cottage and sat down at the ingle-nook to cogitate.

"Blacklockie gi'ed me the last," he said to himself, "but there's Whistlewood. I can depend on him for a pound in a pinch. An' Cairnrigg, he's aye ready. But, save us a'!" jumping up and wagging round the room, slapping his angular hips and giggling to himself.

"Why no' wee Baxter himself, the mischief maker! Ever since we pit him oot o' the kirk for misbehaviour, he's been at me because I dinna ask him for siller that's wanted. Losh keep us! I

hae half a mind tae gie the chirpie a ca'! Heh! Heh! Heh! It wud be maist divertin' to tak' a pound or twa frae him to pay off John's debt tae himsel'. Guid help us! I'll dae it! I'll dae it!"

The excited old shepherd was stamping about the room in high glee when Willie came in. "Willie!" he cried, "Hoo muckle siller hae ye in the box?"

Willie opened the cupboard, took out a wee tin box, and counted its contents.

"There's jist two shillins over the pound we hae gathered for Gibbie!" answered the youth (Gibbie was the tax gatherer).

"A' weel, Gibbie can wait! I've better use for't!" cried William triumphantly. "Gie me the hale o't, and I'll awa."

When William had departed, Willie stood trembling for the wee house o' Weems; for it would appear that it was once more to be emptied of its last farthing.

CHAPTER NINE

A Matter o' Delicacy

LOSH! but that was a thocht aboot Baxter," said the shepherd to himself as he screwed his way down the hill. "I wonder hoo he'll tak' it? Hah! Hah! Hah!"

As luck would have it he met Baxter face to face at the post office.

"How do you do, Mr. Weems? How do you do?" said Baxter in his weak, chipper way.

William took out his snuff mull slowly and gave it a tap.

"I'm no' that bad, Mr. Baxter," he replied; "but I hae a heap o' folk on ma hands the noo. Hoosomever, I canna complain! For the maist pairt I get a' the help I need," helping himself to snuff and returning the mull to his pocket (Baxter did not take snuff).

"Well," said the lawyer, drawing himself up, "when you are short, call on me, Mr. Weems! I shall be glad to do my share, as I have often told you. Nor do I think it altogether friendly of you in the past not to have given me a chance to contribute my little mite, once in a while."

"I hae aye had a deelicacy in askin' ye, Mr. Baxter. For, lawyer-like, ye wud be wantin' to ken particulars. An' that's something I never gie. It's no' for us tae let oor richt hand ken

what oor left's daein' in thae things. The maist deserving folk, an' maist deeficult tae help, ye ken, are the folk that suffer an' winna let on. Sae I hae tae be careful tae gie nae offence."



*"I'm no' that bad, Mr. Baxter, but I hae a heap o' folk
on ma hands the noo"*

"I don't want to know any particulars," replied Baxter, snapping his fingers; "and you can have a pound or two from me any time you want it, Mr. Weems."

The disgraced ex-deacon was anxious to get back his lost character with the kirk folk, and hoped to do so by his offer to help William in his efforts with the needy.

"Weel! Mr. Baxter," said the shepherd, cannily, "I was gawn up tae ask Whistlewood for twa punds this very nicht. He's aye ready. But if ye can spare me the siller, ye'll be daein' a guid turn tae a worthy auld wumman outby! I'll tell ye that much," he concluded, shuffling his crumpled feet about.

"Not another word, Mr. Weems! Not another word! Come along to my office and you shall have the money."

* * * * *

Long before dawn next morning the shepherd was on the road, leading old Bess back to her home.

"Moo! moo-ah!" cried Bess, as she came around the corner.

"Mah! Mah! Ma-a-a!" cried her little calf from the byre behind the palin.

"Surely that's Bess I hear," said John's wife, jumping out of bed. "Ay!" she cried, from the window, "here she is! And the shepherd leadin'. Up, John, quick, and open the door!"

After being patted, stroked, and fondly cluckered about for awhile, old Bess was led into the barn-yard. Then William, John, and John's happy wife went into the log cabin and sat down together.

The shepherd was in a gleeful mood, surprisingly so to John and the wife. They could not understand it; it was a mystery then and *ever* remained a mystery.

"John," said the shepherd, rising and taking a turn or two about the gloomy room, now brightening a little by the light of dawn; "I hae ye'r money! But ye are tae ask me nae questions. Here it is!" laying the exact amount required to pay the Baxter loan into Mrs. Cavan's hand.

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed, hardly understanding her good fortune.

"Noo, we'll hae a bit o' breakfast," said William, "if you will kendle the fire, John. An' if ye will gie me the pail, Mrs. Cavan, I'll awa' oot an' milk the coo while ye're makin' the parritch. After that I'll tell ye what's tae be done."

And when the old shepherd had twisted himself through the door with a big tin pail, in one hand, and a tin dipper in the other—for the strippings—John came softly over to where his wife was standing silent in the middle of the room, with the end of her apron held tightly to her eyes. Holding her in a tender embrace with his single arm, he pressed his honest lips fondly and reverently on her silvery hair. On a spot touched by a golden sunbeam that stole through the wee window of his little home.

"John," said the shepherd after breakfast, tapping his snuff mull excitedly as he spoke, "Awa'

doon wi' ye tae Baxter. Gie him the siller! And get a full written dischairge o' a' indebtedness. But tell him naethin', mind! Ye winna be lang awa'! I'm a wee bit tired and forjasket, so I'll just bide here an' rest my auld banes; an' crack wi' the wife till ye come back. Awa' wi' ye!"

Little Baxter was all smiles when John handed him the money.

"I am very sorry indeed to have to press you, Mr. Cavan," he said; "but really I am so pressed myself that there was no help for it." And he rubbed his bony hands and stroked his straggling black beard. "How is Mrs. Cavan? I haven't seen her for some time. Oh! by the way, you will want a receipt;" reaching for pen and paper.

"Ay. A full dischairge o' a' indebtness, if you please, Mr. Baxter!"

"Yes, yes, certainly, of course!" replied the little man, scratching away on a sheet of foolscap.

"There it is!" handing the paper to John.

"Thank you, Mr. Baxter!" John said, after reading it over and finding it all correct. "Good morning, Mr. Baxter."

"Good morning, Cavan," answered the money-lender; "and if you should need a little loan again at any time, John, I shall be glad to accommodate you. *Sub rosa*, of course! You understand. Good morning! Good morning!" rubbing his hands together. "Give my regards to your good wife!" Then he backed away into his sanctum with a sinister smile on his greedy face.

When John came back he handed the paper to William.

With spectacles adjusted, the shepherd read it over carefully, thought for a moment, then jumped to his feet and shouted "Hurrah!" waved the paper over his head and shouted "Hurrah!" again. Then he slapped his hips with both hands and stamped about the room, laughing hysterically.

"A' weel!" he said, calming down and taking a seat on the three legged stool at the fireplace: "There's nae fuil like an auld fuil, they say." Then, helping himself to a pinch of snuff—scattering a lot of the brown powder on the floor, he went on: "A man will hae his bit foolish pleasure whiles, Mrs. Cavan. Ha! Ha! Ha!" going off into another paroxysm. "Losh keep us, wumman! Ha! Ha! Ha!" slapping his knees in great glee. "But, toots, I maun awa'!"

So, jumping up again, and shaking hands with the wondering old folk, fluttering his bandanna, wiping his eyes, blowing his nose, and giving many another sign of vast inward merriment, the hilarious old man went away down the path from the cabin door, flourishing his staff and chuckling to himself loudly as he went. And the old couple stood in the doorway, looking first at him, then at each other, in bewilderment; firmly believing that good William Weems had taken leave of his senses.

There were two men in Drumcraigie, and only two, whom William Weems took fully into his confidence. These were the minister and the

schoolmaster. Before either, he knew he could generally open his whole heart with safety. But there were times when prudence bade him withhold some things from the minister for fear of allusions that might escape from the pulpit; for Dr. Langmuir was in the habit of illustrating his moral lessons occasionally by pointed reference to daily happenings in the settlement, and the shepherd had to be careful.

This morning William was so brimful of what he had been doing that he could not contain himself. The thing must have vent, and on his way down the road he was in a "swither" whether to go to the minister with it, or to the schoolmaster.

"Losh, keep us!" he muttered to himself, "I'm thinkin' the master wud crack the sides o' him. Ha! Ha! Ha! I'll gang tae him. Prayers will be ower when I reach the schule. An' we'll hae a time o't!"

So, scrambling up the brae to the old log schule, he tapped at the door with the end of his staff, and the master came out.

"Good morning, William! You're early afoot the day. What's happened? Come in! come in! I'm glad to see you!"

"Guid help us, McWhirter!" said the shepherd, breathing excitedly, "come in tae the 'dungeon.' I canna speak tae ye afore the weans!"

The "dungeon" was a dingy little lean-to addition to the back of the school, with a door leading into it at a corner of the main building, on the right hand side of the master's desk. This gloomy

little shanty, with its wee dusty four-paned window high up in the gable end, was used principally for storing kindling-wood, brooms, buckets, mops, and other odds and ends; but its chief claim to service was that it provided a place for the solitary confinement of unruly boys, waiting to be thrashed.

"Shut the door tight, man, so's they'll no' hear us!" whispered the panting shepherd over his shoulder. Then the fun commenced.

For a time there seemed to threaten some startling derangement of the mental faculties of the two men. They whispered together; they held their sides; they gasped at each other; they shouted; they staggered back and forth; shook; sputtered; writhed and wriggled in a frenzy of merriment. But the world outside the "dungeon" *never* knew what it was all about.

The boys and girls in the school overheard the side-splitting laughter of the master. "Yah! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" burst out time and again within the "dungeon," and it gave them courage. The school began to hum. Before long it became pandemonium. Books and bottles began to fly. The boys started a sham fight, that quickly developed into a real fight. And the girls, at the other end of the school, took to playing the "tug o' war." The whole place was in the wildest uproar when the "dungeon" door suddenly opened, and a shrill, imperious cry of "Silence!" rang from the master. Then there was a scurry for seats, a flutter on the benches, and an ominous calm.

CHAPTER TEN

The Master o' the Old Log School

THE MASTER of the old log school was a Glasgow University scholar—a stern, little, righteous man, of keen visage, who stamped his character on the boys and girls of the settlement, and prepared them for honest usefulness in the world. He taught the Bible in the school, this upright little master; and all other branches of learning, from A.B.C. to the highest classics. He taught orthography, etymology, biography, astronomy, geography, and general cosmography; algebra, compound proportion, surveying, vocal music, and drawing. He taught French, German, Latin, and Greek. He taught all about the rivers and mountains and watersheds of the world, and all about the stars above the world. He told of the productions, manners, and customs of all the countries of the world, pointing out their boundaries and bearings on the two-and-thirty points of the compass. And besides all this, he was particular to instil into the minds and hearts of the scholars of Drumcraigie high national patriotism, and Kirk loyalty.

He was a man who would brook no interference in any branch of his work; a man who was arbitrary in his methods. He held the parents back

with an iron hand. He kept the ministers in their places, and ruled with an honest heart, a firm hand, and two kinds of leather tawse. Absolute truthfulness in his pupils was deemed no merit by McWhirter. He expected that, as a matter of course. An exact, and complete confession of any ordinary offence did not save the delinquent from the sting of the tawse. But woe betide the boy who told a lie.

Taking advantage of the master's absence in the "dungeon," that morning, the bully of the school, Mort Menzie, sat tickling and tormenting little Bobbie Todd, who was working away diligently at his lesson on the low front form before him. Jimmie Gill, a mild, poetical chap, sat two seats behind Mort. Erskine Blair, the laird of Whistlewood's son, sat with the advanced boys on the back bench of the school, four seats behind Jimmie Gill.

Erskine was looking around at the riotous part of the school from his high back seat, when he glimpsed Mort annoying little Bobbie. On the impulse of the moment he picked up his square, blocky Bible lying in front of him, and let it fly at Mort's head, where it arrived with a bang that started stars. Mort was howling when the master entered and shouted "*Silence!*"

"*Boo-hoo!* Jimmie-Gill-hit-me-over-the-head — with his Bible. *Boo-hoo!*" With a glance of his keen eye, the master took in the situation. After

he had conducted the shepherd politely to the door, and bade him a cheerful "good-bye," he turned and glared at the school.

Meaning to punish severely for the row he had found going on, he pulled his little brown leather tawse from his coat-tail pocket, and threw the strap into Jimmie Gill's lap, shouting fiercely to Jimmie to "*come up!*"

Innocent Jimmie went up with the tawse in his hand, presented the strap to the master and commenced to remonstrate. But the master was in no humour to waste time, and at once raised the tawse.

"*Stop!*" cried Erskine Blair, coming forward with his hand up. "*It was me!*"

"You! What do you mean, Sir?" shouted the master.

"I was looking around and saw Mort Menzie poking Bobbie Todd, and I let him have it!" the boy answered bravely.

"And what business had you looking around instead of learning your lessons, Sir?"

"I know them!" Erskine replied, with a firm mouth.

"Hold out your hand, Sir!" And the boy got the punishment intended for Jimmie Gill.

When Erskine was returning to his seat, rubbing his stinging hand on his hip-side, Mort leaned over and sneeringly whispered, "Is it hot?" Erskine turned suddenly and swung his fist into Mort's

eyes with a smash that sent the big bully sprawling on the school floor.

"That's how hot it is!" he growled.

The fat was now in the fire with a vengeance. Off flew the master's coat. "*Silence*" he shouted again. And you might have heard a pin fall.

* * * * *

McWhirter had a fancy at times of trying offenders in judicial fashion, sitting back behind his desk and calling up witnesses. In the present instance he held court in due form. When all the evidence was in, he promptly dismissed Erskine, whom he considered had been sufficiently punished. But the case against Mort was a serious one. It was proven that Mort knew Erskine had thrown the book, but, from fear of a fight with the sturdy son of "Whistlewood," he put the blame on weak, innocent Jimmie Gill. This cowardly cunning aroused all the indignation of the master, and Mort was awarded the extremest punishment known to the school.

Two of the biggest boys—Jim McMullin and Peter Rennie—were ordered to roll the culprit's trousers "up to the hips."

Whilst this was being done the master stamped about, nursing his wrath into terrible fury. "I'll teach you a lesson, my brave man!" he shouted, and the breathless school, on tiptoe of excitement, trembled.

When all was ready the electric little master stepped quickly up to his desk, jerked the lid of it up, and drew out his long black heavy tawse, those reserved for the worst offenders. He squeezed the big cat-o-nine-tails nervously from end to end as he stamped down from the desk. Gripping them firmly in his muscular right hand, he gave them a sharp, significant whirl, glaring a moment at his victim. Then he took a little run at the bully, and the scorching commenced.

"I'll teach you to lie to me!" Swish! "You hulking coward!" Swish! swish! swish! "Ow! ow!" Mort yelled, as he clapped his hands on the burning spots. Thus, round and round, the two of them swished and wriggled until, from hip to heel, the bare white legs of the howling culprit turned red and blue, and began to trickle blood.

* * * * *

Besides being the rigorous master of the school, McWhirter filled many other important posts in the community. He was master in the Sunday school, and principal of the Drumcraigie singing class, and precentor in the Free Kirk. He was postmaster, township clerk, returning officer, president of the Horticultural Society, president of the Bible and Tract Society; and a model farmer. Indeed, but for his contempt for any and all kinds of political dissimulation and corrupt methods, he might have gone to Parliament and become Prime Minister of Canada. It was as schoolmaster,

however, that the folk most valued McWhirter. As a teacher and trainer of boys, he was considered the only living possibility for Drumcraigie.

* * * * *

"Losh keep me the day, Tweedie! What's the warld comin' tae?"

"What's up noo, Meg?"

Tweedie was the little fat, baggy-eyed grocer and general storekeeper at the corner. He was always ready for a "canty crack," or a bit of idle scandal. Meg Owen was the round, pudgy wife of "Snuffy" Owen, the miller's man. Meg was the "news record" of the town. A ferret for news, always running about from door to door, drinking tea, hearing things, and passing them on.

"Owen wis tellin' me that Baker Walker wis tellin' Sandy Wilkie, and Sandy Wilkie wis tellin' him, that the maister's gaun tae gie up the schule."

"Hoot, nonsense, Meg! Ye're surely haverin'!"

"Haverin' or no. If the maister gies up we're din. Ay, Tweedie, we're din!"

Sitting down plump on Tweedie's deal chair, with her fat hands folded on her broad apron, Meg looked the picture of despair.

"What's happened, Meg?"

"Weel, that's no' said," wiping her brow. "Owen says he's gawn tae quit the schule tae dae his ain wark an the farm. My certies, if the maister gies up we may as weel pit oot the cannal and gang tae oor lang, lang beds."

It should be noted that Meg's boy, Tommy, was at the school, expecting prizes.

"Ay, it'll be bad for the bairns. But they'll get a new teacher I dinna misdoot," observed Tweedie, blowing his nose into a dust rag.

"What wud we dae wi' a new teacher in Drumcraigie?" skirled Meg. "Na, na! we want nae new-fangled dominie in oor midst, Tweedie; him that's there maun bide, or, I tell ye, a' oor bried's dough!"

And there was some reason for the faith folk had in McWhirter. Meg knew, as indeed they all knew, that one of the most eloquent preachers in the land, and a Moderator of the Canadian Kirk, was an old boy of the log school. And they knew that another boy of McWhirter's had become a distinguished senator, another an author, another a gallant commander; that brave sons of the school had fought and died for the Empire, and that, scattered all over the world, there were to be found, in all spheres of life, sturdy men filling posts of the highest responsibility, professional and industrial, who sprang from the loins of the Drumcraigie folk, and who had learnt their first lessons of life in McWhirter's log school.

So Meg had some warrant to justify her outcry.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Fec o't's Blethers

THE BRIGHT June sun beat hot upon the roads leading up and down the river banks, and north and south over the braes. A hazy, fragrant exhalation from the newly plowed fields along the country wayside floated in the air. Frisky lambs gambolled over little grassy knolls in the fields, and in and out along the corners of the snake fences, where their newly-clipt mother ewes, panting, nibbled sweet herbage in the shade. Little grey groundbirds, blooming robins and gold-tinted meadow-larks, twittering and piping, flitted about the stumps gathering bits of dry grass to build their spring nests.

Wild bumblebees and humming-birds jinked from flower to flower, sucking the first honey of spring; beating their little dreamy drums as they flashed in golden specks over rail fences and log piles.

All nature, breathing new-born life, made a sweet-flavored scene, and a simmering harmony of subdued sound in the sequestered place; the rhythmic murmur broken at intervals by the ring of the blacksmith's anvil at the corner "smiddy," and continuously by the rumbling of the boisterous Craigie, tumbling its swollen water down between the towering rocks.

There was the usual little stir, and the daily common gossip in the village, and over the country-side, ploughmen, in coarse straw hats and "hickory" shirts, whistled tunefully in the fields.

At the log school on the hill top, Bible reading and prayer opened the morning exercises, as usual; and at intermission and the noon hour laughing boys and girls romped and played "pom-pom pull-away" between the school fence and the kirk dyke, and "king-o'-the-castle" on the big stone on the brae side.

And all through the day the mill on the river turned its stones, grinding out grists of flour and meal for the hungry folk.

The tannery vats were busy giving up their soaking skins to the scrapers. The saddler tugged his waxed threads through his harness straps. The sweating cobbler pegged at his last and gossiped with a neighbour on affairs of state. The joiner pushed his plane in loneliness and mumbled o' the kirk. The baker kneaded his dough with bare feet, dancing his Indian war dance over his tub of flour paste. The tailor crouched on his sewing board, flashed his little needle, bit his thread, and ever and anon singed mended clothes with his iron goose. The grocer stood at his shop door with apron on, arms akimbo, whistling for a stray customer. The slant-headed village sawyer, tall, Irish, and angular, in sleeved waistcoat, stalked slowly from door to door, with his saw-horse and buck-saw across his back, cross-cutting slabs for good wives' stoves.

and crying "thanks be to God!" as he pocketed his pennies.

It was in the middle of this calm, peaceful afternoon, that "daft Jock"—the village bellman—waggling up and down in the middle of the scorching street, singing psalms and muttering oaths, caught Tibb, the tinker, and gave him a jab that caused a stir in the place.

Tibb had been telling the town, with great unction, that Dobson, the revivalist, had converted him the week before. Jock overheard this; and, without mentioning the matter to any one, the dafty made up his cunning mind to watch the convert.

So, in his apparently aimless wanderings, Jock climbed the north brae, passed around the Auld Kirk yard, and "howked" his way along the middle of the dusty highroad toward the place where Tibb lived, singing as he went, "All people that on earth do dwell."

And as he came near Tibb's place he heard a moaning sound ahead, and stood a moment with his hand to his ear. "That's Tibb's v'ice, I'm thinkin'," he said to himself; "let's hear what the scoondrel's saein'!"

Approaching the gate and opening it slowly, Jock edged himself quietly up to the window of the horse byre, shaded his eyes, and "keeked" in. "Ay, if it's no'!" he said to himself, as he saw Tibb posing at the manger of the horse stall.

Hopping quickly over on tiptoe, Jock cautiously

opened the door and listened. He heard the tinker blubbering the words used by Dobson at the revival: "Oh! Lord, what are we? What are we?"

"A' wheen daum'd horse cheats!" hissed Jock, and scuttled away.

The incident was the scandal of the place for



"A' wheen daum'd horse cheats"

three days. Snuffy Owen's wife, Meg, passing at the time, told the town that "Tibb burst out o' the byre wi' a graip in his hand, roarin' like a Bull o' Bashan, an' sweerin' like tae crack the clouds!"

She further assured her hearers that she was "so frichted at his awfu' lang-widge," that she had to "stap her ears wi' her thooms an' rin!"

The town knew that if Meg was so fearfully shocked the language must have been awful. And when she told the news at the store next morning, Tweedie laughed till she thought he would "fa'doon!"

"But that's no' a'," she said; "Jock went mutterin' tae himsel' a' the way doon in front o' me. 'What are we, is't? I ken fine what are ye! A wheen o' the deevilist, cheatin', gypsy tinkers that ever traded horse! I'll what are we ye! Ye big bubblin' bag o' wind!"

"He-Hiche-ee, Hiche-Hich!" sneezed Tweedie through his stubby nose.

"That's the best thing I've h'ard for months, Meg," he gurgled, as he wiped the water from his pouched eyes with his shirt sleeve.

Tweedie knew that Tibb, the "convert," had cruelly cheated Jonas Jackson in a horse deal the week before, and he enjoyed Jock's caper immensely.

"Ay. But what dae ye think o' a' theae folk that's gettin' new herts as they ca' it, a' ower the country-side? Tell me that!" cried Meg imperatively, staring at Tweedie.

"A' blethers, Meg, Blethers! Blethers!" blowing his nose into his apron.

"That's my wy o't, tae, Tweedie! I hae nae faith in theae quickly converted folk wha cackle sae cock-sure frae the hoose-tops!" throwing her apron over her arm with a contemptuous jerk.

"Or frae byres, Meg! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!"
"Ay, or byres!"

"Did I tell ye aboot oor tenant?" Meg went on, giving Tweedie a sly glance. "My certies! Us wi' a tenant! Wha wad ever hae thocht we wad ever get the length o' ha'en a tenant?" rolling her eyes.

"Weel!" settling herself down on an upturned butter keg, "Thae folk wha rented oor bit placie ower in Garafraxa. I dinna ken very muckle aboot them, but I'm telt they're gran' at the revival meetin's doon by. But they're no' sae grand at payin' their rent! Let me tell ye that! Aye ahint!" she shouted. "So, though Owen didna like it, I took it intae ma heid on Saturday that I would jist pit on ma bonnet an' gae ower and ask for what they owe us. When I cam in, an' sat me doon in the parlor, my certies! I found a wheen lang faced weemin folk sittin' there wi' their fingers folded, an', losh, before I had time tae breathe the wife ups an' at me afore them a': 'Have you found the Loard, Mrs. Owen?' 'It's no' the Loard I'm seekin' the nicht, Mrs. Sanders! It's ma rent!' I snappit at her. An', losh, you should hae seen her."

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Goad help us! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!" roared Tweedie, with his head thrown back. "That wad stunner her awee! Ha! Ha! Ha! An' did ye get ye'r rent? He! He! He!"

"No' me!" sighed Meg. "Ay, Tweedie!" she went on, "Ye may weel laugh. But I'm thinkin' ye're aboot richt. *The fec o't's blethers!*"

PART TWO

*Through a' the weary brunt they bore,
Mid a' the gloom and grey o't,
The folk had mony a "rousin' splore,"
And mony a "roarin'" day o't.*

—Lang Syne.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Channel-Stanes

THE SCOTS o' Drumcraigie all played the game o' "Channel Stanes" in their "ain pairts" at home, before they settled in the wilds of Canada. And, in the thirties and forties of last century, they curled here with nicely turned bird's-eye maple blocks. Later they played with "braw" stones from Kilmarnock, black, blue, grey, and mottled.

The meadow glen, with its little wimplin' burn snaking down the middle, lay behind the log school and the Auld Kirk, beyond the North Brae top, and stretched away half a mile west, ending in a pretty cove of the deep woods, where the beavers had built a wide dam. The curlers met in that cosy corner, in the shadows of the tall cedars, "for a day o't," when the wind was too "nippy" on the river mill-dam, or too "drachty" on the washing-green "howe" that lay aslant between the high overhanging cliffs of the river below the dam.

The Drumcraigie Curling Club was composed of Scots from both the kirks, the Auld and the Free; and their meetings on the ice did much to promote good fellowship between the kirks. For it must be remembered that where you have keen curlers you have always generous men, and men, for the most part, who are true gentlemen.

Every year a specially important game was played by the Club, for a barrel o' meal for the poor; the competing teams being a rink of Auld Kirk curlers and a rink of curlers from the Free Kirk. This annual fixture was looked forward to by the kirks with the greatest interest. The game was followed by a curlers' dinner, with speech and song, lasting till midnight. And, next to St. Andrew's Night with its haggis, the Curlers' Night, with its beef and greens, was the joy of the whole year.

Sir Adam Barclay Drummond, founder of the town, had moved from the district to his new home nestling on the sunny slope of Burlington Mountain, whence he could more conveniently attend to his parliamentary duties as President of the Canada Legislative Council. But he maintained his social connection with Drumcraigie, and continued president of the Curling Club. Though no longer an active member, joining in the game, he nevertheless made it a special point to be in attendance at the yearly opening meeting of the Club, and never failed to be present at the feast following the annual Kirk match, to preside over that hilarious function. And the curlers made it a point to hold their battle o' the Kirks' at the height of the frozen season, and on a day convenient to Sir Adam.

* * * * *

Davie Galbraith's mail coach from the south did not get into Drumcraigie in those days until

late in the evening. The letters and papers were untied at the post office and pigeon-holed the same night, but were not given out until the following morning. And before the wee wicket opened in the morning, waiting folk gathered in little groups in the office to enquire "at" each other, about the bairns, the "coos," and the pig-killin'.

Sandy Bamfy from Garafraxa, stiffened with rheumatism, was sitting on the low wood box in the corner warming his crooked fingers at the hot stove on a cold Saturday morning in December, when the Laird of Whistlewood came smiling into the post office. Sandy had driven four miles through the deep snow at hoary dawn, expecting a letter from his daughter at Guelph.

"Is this you, Sandy?" the brisk laird asked kindly. "You're early in th' day. How's your rheumatism, my man?"

Sandy drew his knotted hands up slowly, placed their palms on his thighs and attempted to rise. Turning his broad, red face on Whistlewood as he stopped half straightened, he sighed, "That's the wy o't, laird!"

"Man, man!" exclaimed Whistlewood, sympathetically.

"Ay!" continued Sandy, shaking his head mournfully, "I've nae pleasure in ony kind o' wark noo, laird. No' even the pig-sticken'!"

Snuffy Owen, the miller's man, came in. Nobody ever knew Snuffy to get any letters, but Snuffy always came in.

"How are you th' day, Snuffy?" asked Whistlewood, giving the man's shoulder a hearty pat. "And how's Meg?"

"Oh! she's sittin' up, laird; sittin' up!" tapping his mull and pushing a supply of brown powder into his long, flexible nose with the flat of his thumb. (Snuffy was facetious. He meant that his wife was in perfect health.)

"This is a fine morning, Doctor!" said Whistlewood cheerfully, turning to Doctor Muckle, who came shuffling in with a scowl on his haggard face.

"Weel, fa's findin' faut wi' the mornin', Whistlewood?" grunted the doctor.

Then the little wicket window in the office flew open, and the rosy daughter of the postmaster handed a square letter to Whistlewood. The laird immediately tore the envelope open and read the letter through, smiling, and rubbing his chin while he read it. The folk were watching him closely.

"The laird's gotten a letter frae Sir Adam!" whispered Snuffy to Sandy, nudging him as the laird passed out. "I saw his crest on't," he added knowingly.

"What's in the wind, think ye, Snuffy?" asked Sandy, after the laird had gone.

"I'll no' say," answered Snuffy, snickering and scratching his head. "It'll maybe be aboot the Kirk curlin'. The laird was sae gleefu'!"

Jock, the village "dafty," bustling by with his short kicking elbows (Jock was always jerking about somewhere in a hurry), knocked his elbow

accidently against the doctor as he came down the little step, opening his snuff box. The powder from the mull went to the wind, and the scowling doctor roared at Jock's fat back hurrying by.

"Oot the rodd, you dirty swine!"

Jock was insulted. Without looking back, or to the right or left, he bounded along with his nose in his fist, howling in half smothered anger: "Ta hell wi' snuffin' doctirs! Druckin' snuffin' doctirs! Ta hell wi' snuffin', druckin' doctirs! Ow! Ow! the stink o' them! Ouch!"

Jock ran into the Rev. Doctor Langmuir coming round the corner, and nearly knocked the doctor down.

"Keep's a'! Jock, my man! What's happened?"

"Wheest, Doctor, listen!" (in a dramatic whisper). "Is there ony snuffin' in Heevin', think ye?"

"Na, na! Jock, my man," answered the doctor, adjusting his spectacles; "nothing can enter there that is impure, or unclean, my man!"

"A' weel! it's hell's bleezes for him then!" Jock hissed, as he turned on his heel, and hustled away.

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When Whistlewood left the post office he hurried, with elastic steps, to see the laird of Wattfield, whom he met coming down the brae.

"Man, Wattfield, I was just on my way to see you!" he called out at a distance of several yards. "Sir Adam writes that he is to be here on Tuesday, next week," holding up the letter just received.

Wattfield stood before his friend a moment or two before replying; then, running his eye slyly across the leadening sky, he said: "I'm afraid, Whistlewood, it's gaun to be soft!" He was a calm, calculating man, was Wattfield.

"Soft or hard," said enthusiastic Whistlewood, "we'll need to hae the game then, or we'll no' hae Sir Adam wi' us. He writes that that's the only time he can come."

"It will be bad for the Auld Kirk if the ice turns a wee saft!" laughed Wattfield with a low chuckle. "Have ye seen William?"

"No' yet! but I intend to look him up at once!"

"Wha's tae curl wi' him, did ye hear?" Wattfield had some shrewd thoughts in his deep mind.

"Ay. The shepherd told me on Sunday that Blacklockie's to play third stone. Glenfergie is to lead, and the minister himsel' is to play second stone."

"Man! that's a strong rink!" replied Wattfield, slowly "But I'm nae sae sure aboot him having Blacklockie if the game is to be on Tuesday. That's the day o' Blacklockie's threshing, isn't it?"

"Keep's a'! I forgot a' aboot the threshing!" returned Whistlewood excitedly. "And I was to gang" (whistling through puckered lips, and kicking the snow about under his feet). "But I can send Ertie, or Quintin'! Ye're no' gaun, are ye?" he asked in alarm.

"No; I promised to send Jimmie Skeoch. Jimmie's going. So I'm a' right for the game;"

replied Wattfield, looking up at the sky again, from east to west. "I'm awfu' afraid, though, that the January thaw's settin' in," smiling and showing a fine row of white teeth; "but it'll no' be sae bad for us on Tuesday, man, if it should be a wee saft. Ha! Ha! Ha! Especially if Blacklockie canna be there tae pull William through. He! He!"

Wattfield's voice had a kindly, comradery crackle in it, as he chuckled to Whistlewood on the brae side.

Whistlewood met William Weems, the old bent shepherd, on the bridge, screwing and dotting along towards him on his staff.

"Weel, William! are ye ready?" he cried, waving Sir Adam's letter before the shepherd.

"Hae ye had wurd?" asked William eagerly, turning up a beaming face, and stroking his long, grey beard.

"Ay! It's tae be Tuesday! He's comin' next Tuesday. So ye'll need tae get ye're lads thegither my man!"

Whistlewood was a strong, hearty man; everybody liked him, and he inspired everybody who met him with enthusiasm.

The shepherd had been chosen by the Auld Kirk curlers early in the season, to skip the game against Whistlewood, who was to skip the rink of the Free Kirk. Both were looking forward gleefully to the great event, particularly noticing changes in that most important factor, the weather. In their imaginations they were hourly changing

the stones to be used, and placing their curlers in the game to best meet the condition of the weather and the ice.

"Dod, that's guid news, Whustlewood!" said the shepherd, giving his heavy plaid a hitch. "But, man, I'm kynda dootsu' aboot the weather!" glancing at the sky and shrugging his shoulders. "My auld banes tells me there's something saft comin', maybe only a bit snow-fa'. But we hae three days yet; and I houp, man, it may be brittle by Tuesday."

"Tam, man, I've been watchin' for ye," said the excited shepherd to Tom Todd, next morning, at the Kirk door. "We're tae play the Frees on Tuesday, storm or shine! At the Washing-green, maybe. If the ice is no' guid there, or if it turns oot stormy, we're to play on the Beaver's Dam. Whustlewood is to arrange a' that!" (he spoke hurriedly). Looking up anxiously into Tom's face he added, "Ye'll be on hand?"

"Ay, William," whispered Tom; "if it storms deevils frae the bottom o' hell I'll be wi' ye!"

"Awa' in, then!" said the shepherd, patting Tom's fat back. And the two passed solemnly into the Kirk, at the moment the precentor was sounding his tuning-fork for the first psalm.

* * * * *

After Kirk service the minister and William were in the vestry alone; the minister pocketing his notes and laying off his gown and bands; and the

shepherd busying himself tying up the collection in his bandanna. Both minister and elder glanced furtively at one another from time to time, but neither spoke. Both minds were running in the same direction; and there was an answering glint in each other's eyes. But the merry twinkle that passed between them had nothing to do with the sermon. The shepherd spoke first.

"It's tae be on Tuesday!"

"Tuesday?" shouted the minister in consternation.

"Ay," gasped William, startled.

Doctor Langmuir scratched his forehead and took a step over to the wee white window facing the kirk yard. He adjusted his spectacles and looked through the long pointed fringe of icicles that hung outside from the window frame. And, gazing upon the frozen hoods of hard snow that clung to the tops of the tombstones beyond, he rubbed his round chin and shook his head. Suddenly he turned around and gave the shepherd a long, solemn, and deeply troubled look. And then he spoke with direful emphasis.

"Are-you-not-aware, William, that-the-Presbytery-meets-on-Tuesday?"

And with that he tightened his lips and turned again to the window and glowered out upon the frozen world.

"Guid save us!" cried the astonished shepherd, throwing up his hands, "I clean forgot aboot the Presbytery! What in the world's tae be din?"

The minister and the elder stood tense for a moment, some mysterious concurrent operation going on in their busy minds. The elder was the first again to break the silence, and there was a pleading light in his keen old eyes as his thin voice crackled,

*"Can - ye - no' - hae - the - Presbytery - Meetin' -
pit - aff?"*

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Getting Ready

TUESDAY was the last day of the year, and William was up in the morning before the sun, bustling about in his snug cottage on the face of the South Brae, making preparations to get his curlers together to meet the Free Kirk four on the Beaver's Dam.

"Wullie, my laddie," he said to his son as they finished their "coggie o' parritch," "ye'll lead for me the day. I'm tae play Whustlewood the Kirk game at the end o' the glen. Glenfergie wis tae lead for me, but he's awa' tae Blacklockie's threshin' bee. Gang doon an' cry up Matha, and tell him tae get ready tae play third stane. Tam Todd's tae be oor second. Blacklockie and Glenfergie and the minister hae a' failed me! Tak' my mull wi' ye tae Tweedie, and tell him tae fill 't wi' his best shneesin'. Fetch me a new broom frae Tweedie's. Tell Matha that Whustlewood's tae hae the stanes a' up, an' a' thing in order. Rin ower tae the manse and tell the minister to come in by and see the end o' the game on his way back frae the Presbytery! Noo haste ye awa', ma man!"

Closing the door behind Willie, the excited shepherd stood a while at his window, looking out on the cold world. He saw Bob Dalzell's sleigh team crunching by with a load of barrelled meal

from Monkland Mills, Bob rubbing his blue ears with his red mittens, and as he turned way from the window he muttered gleefully to himself, "Fegs, but-it's-a-gran'-brittle-morn. I'm-thinkin'-we'll-hae-a-day-o't-the-day. But - I'm-sair-vexed-the-minister-canna-come!"

After breakfast at "Whistlewood" the laird spoke over the barn gate to his man, "tending the kye."

"Never mind tree fellin' th' day, Quintin. The shepherd's to play the Kirk game wi' me at the glen end. And I want you to yoke the oxen and gang doon to the Washing-green for the stanes! You'll find them a' in the little hoose yonder. William's 'Ailsa's' ye'll ken by a wee chippy oot o' ain o' them. Craighead's handles are in them. Monkland's 'Deuckies' ye ken; and Martha's black 'Chuckies' wi' the iron handles, ye ken them. The laird o' Wattfield's name's on his. Mind Tam Todd's 'Dapples,' and the minister's 'Wabblers'—William's Willie's tae play wi' them th' day. Ranal-stane tak's his 'Sconies' aye hame wi' him. Ye'll need to ca' round for them. And, oh, man! be careful o' my bonnie wee 'Granites' wi' the white bone handles. And mind to pit some straw in the bottom o' the sleigh, no' tae scratch the bottoms o' the stanes. When ye're comin' up the brae, gie a ca' in-by at the schule, and tell the master to come and see the finish o' the game when the schule scales. Help the lads at the dam till we come. Fa' tae wi' your broom, and gie the snaw a bit dicht a' roon aboot."

Quintin was always glad to change the occupation of tree-felling for the "ploy o' curlin," and right soon he had his big whip whirling and flicking about the haunches of old "Buck" and "Bright," as they hunkered away across the frozen burn, and creaked over the brae past the Auld Kirk dyke.

The enthusiastic laird, in high feather, turned in through the back door of his comfortable cottage, to calm his eagerness in the sympathetic companionship of his wife by the warm fireside.

"Whew! but it's cauld, gudewife!" blowing into his hands and extending them gleefully over the blazing fire.

"Quintin's to ca' in and ask the master to come and see the end o' the game in the gloamin'. He'll dootless no' come. But I'm ettin' to wheedle him to the denner doonby. And I'm thinkin' he'll be in fine humor for a sang on the eve o' the New Year."

"Wha has the shepherd gotten to play wi' him in place o' the minister and the lairds?" asked the good wife thoughtfully, as she sat darning her husband's mittens. Like many another man's good wife in this world, she liked her good man to win all his games.

"His ain lad Willie's to lead for him. Tom Todd plays the second stane, and Martha Spiers plays the third. But, hoots, wumman! I'm no' muckle feared o' thae Auld Kirkers; wi' Monkland and Ranalstane leading for me; and wi' Wattfield tae follow wi' the third stane."

"I'm thinkin', gude man, William maybe has the best o't yet, tae start wi'" (dubious wife!). "Wattfield, ye aye say, is sic a puir sweeper!"

"Ay, he's a' that, gude wife!" dropping his chin; "but the day's keen; and the sweepin' 'll be



*"Keep's a', I hope Wattfield 'll be in fettle th' day.
I'm feelin' fine mysel'"*

light. Ranalstane and Monkland will manage the sweepin' fine," turning his back to the fire and facing his wife hopefully, "Ye ken hoo weel Wattfield can draw through a port, an' lay a bonnie

gaird!" And with hands suddenly clasped behind him, he stepped smartly to the window and peered through the frosty panes at the snow drifts piled outside. "*Keep's a'!*" he said as he looked out; "*I hope Wattfield 'll be in fettle th' day; I'm feelin' fine mysel'.*"

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There were two entrances to the old log school, one for the boys at the south end of the building, and the other in the middle of the east side for the girls' use. Both doors were worn and warped by the summer sun and winter storms of twenty years.

McWhirter, like Mr. Melville, the Free Kirk minister, never found time to curl, but always took a keen interest in the game, and seldom missed the annual dinner.

When Quintin sidled softly up to the end door, whip in hand, a judicial trial was going on inside before the master. Little Willie Wilkie was "up for leein'." So it chanced that the disturbing tap-tap of the ploughman's whipshank brought the master scurrying to the door in an ill fume. The laird's man, with his bonnet doffed, stood back and delivered his message with all politeness.

"Tell Whistlewood and the rest," blared the busy little master, "that I have no time for curling!" Then the door banged, and frightened Quintin tip-toed quickly away. But as he creaked around the corner with his ox-sleigh, he heard a sharp tap

on one of the windows of the school. An instant later the girls' door opened with a squeaky jerk, and the master, appearing at the cheek of the opening, cried in a softer key, "*Hie, man! Hie!* Tell them if I can spare an hour to-night I'll come to the denner and gie them a sang!"

The master rarely spoke in the vernacular, but when he did all hearts warmed to him. And Quintin, now heartened, whistled and sang cheerily as he haw'd and gee'd away up the glen.

"Hurray for the curlin'!
Here's tae the curlin'!
Hip, hip, hurray! for the game wi' the stanes!
Hurray for the ring o't,
The roar and the ring o't,
Hurray, hurray, for the besom and stanes."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A Roarin' Day O't

WHEN old shepherd William reached the "Beaver's Dam" and climbed over the lip of it, puffing through a long beard covered with hoar-frost, he cried, "Hech, man, Whustlewood, I'm sair winded and for-foughen wi' that lang trachle through the snaw! Hae ye ony o' Peter's bree wi' ye, man?"

"Ay, William! Ahint the loggie yonder ye'll find a bit piggie wi' a drappie in't. Be carefu' o't!"

Peter was the whiskey distiller of Drumcraigie. With his little still cocked on the north brink of the river below the mill, he brewed his "Glenlivet" to cheer the folk all the way from Dundas to Owen Sound. Later on he brewed with a new worm on the opposite brink of the Craigie, over the tannery flume. And Snuffy Owen, snuffling, and snickering, and slyly nudging his neighbour coming by from the Kirk, used to say, "Peter mak's a hantle hetter bree noo', He! He! He! He!"

A spidery little foot-bridge swung across between the old and the new stills, from cliff to cliff, high up over the swirling foam below the dam. And "Mithers' laddies," with their little tin pails, picked their way over this rickety web in terror, as they visited the place to buy their penny-worths

o' yeast for "bried risin'," Peter's face frightened bairns; and it was only when his back was turned that the laddies "daured" fling their chuckie stanes into the "sweem" below, where the speckled trout swarmed.

* * * * *

"That's a gy guid-lookin' bit o' ice!" said the shepherd, wiping his lips and rubbing the frost from his white beard with his red bandanna. "Let's try a stane on't!"

With his foot in the newly-cut hack, William's stone glinted away from his hand, angling across the rink to the corner of the snow bank.

"Dod, man! Whaur's it gaun? Haud a wee," he continued, waggling away down the ice in a hurry; "I maun try 't frae the ither end. Lay ye'r bonnet on the tee there, Matha!" he shouted over his shoulder. Then, steadying himself in the far hack, he landed his second stone well within the ring. Coming slowly back, tapping his snuff-mull, he mumbled . . . "Ay - ay - nae - sae - bad - at - this - end; but - raether - bias - at - the - ither, I'm thinkin'!"

The skips now tossed the broom from hand to hand for lead. Hand over hand to the top of the handle gave Whistlewood the last little grip. He swung the broom around his head with a flourish, and the shepherd had to commence the game.

"Come on, then, Wullie, my lad!" cried the shepherd in a high key. "Ca' canny! There's

the snuff!" dropping a pinch from his mull into the tee-hole. "There!" looking down at the gliding stone approaching. "That's nae sae bad!" he cried, as the stone stopped a few inches past the tee; "but raether far forrit, laddie," whisking the ice with his new broom.

"Now, Monkland," cried Whistlewood in his clear, robust voice, "Willie's stane's a wee past the tee. Just draw to the back of it; and lie there. Sweep, Ranalstane! Sweep, man! Up, now! That'll do fine." The stone came within a few inches of Willie's and lay on the edge of the tee-hole.

"Wullie, ye'll need tae come tae that," cried the shepherd. "Lift them baith a wee! Dinna miss't! Hoot, man!" frowning, "Ye'r awa' by! Ye didna lay doon tae ma broom, laddie!"

"Back a wee, Monkland!" called Whistlewood calmly, "about there!" laying the flat side of his broom on the ice in front. "I want a half guard on your ain stone. Sweep! Sweep! Sweep!" The sweepers answered the call vigorously. "Man! that's on the very bit!" cried the laird smiling. "Thank you, Monkland!" he shouted as the stone slowed up and curled to the exact spot where he had laid his broom.

"Hoo much dae ye see o't, Tam?" cocking his broom on top of Monkland's winner; "About an inch!" answered Tom Todd from the far hack.

"Weel, tak' what ye see!" cried the shepherd's thin voice. "That's about the borrow," giving

the direction with the edge of his broom on the ice. "A canny draw, wi' yer elbow in! Steady, noo!" he cried, "Dinna look at it, lads! It's comin' fine! It's a' richt! Yer a gran' curler, Tam!" (he was delighted). "Losh, man!" (he suddenly shouted, stroking his beard) "ye've miss't it, man! That beats a'!" Then, turning around, he mumbled sulkily, as he impatiently tapped his mull; "Tam-never-could-curl-verra-muckle-onwyway!"

"Now, Ranalstane, it's your turn!" called Whistlewood, "Give me another half guard on this side. That's like it!" (as the stone left Ranalstane's hand). "Man! you're looking fine!"

The stone was winding beautifully down the rink. "Come awa' wi't! There, now! Ay'!" looking down as it settled. "A wee wide! But it's no' bad!" And he gave the ice a brisk, frisky brush with his broom.

"Will ye try the port, Tam, think ye?" asked William. "It's gy narrow! But if ye miss't ye may flee the gairds! Try it! An' gie't a bitty pouther! Man! ye'r like it! There! Awa' them! Grawnd!" he shouted triumphantly as the guarding stones went flying to the snow bank.

The old shepherd now tapped his mull and waggled himself gleefully around the tee, took a great nostril of snuff, and flung some waste powder over his shoulder.

"Ranalstane, the guards are both gone!" cried Whistlewood in alarm. "Give me a stone right in front," slapping his broom on the ice. "Be

ready to sweep, lads. I would like you just inside the ring, mind, aboot there!" patting the ice with his broom. "Come awa'!" he cried to a weakly played stone. "Keep's a', man, you're a hog! Keep it running! Sweep, Monkland! Sweep, Wattfield!" jumping about and beating the air excitedly. "Sweep! Sweep! Dear me, man,—you're only half ower." The stone had stopped on the hog-score.

"Tak' it aff!" he cried, turning away in a funk.

The shepherd, who meanwhile was pushing snuff into both nostrils at an alarming rate, fluttered out his bandanna and smiled broadly across the ice to giggling Tom, with a kindly passing glance to his own lad Willie.

"Come fair on't, Matha!" the shepherd shouted, cocking the edge of his broom on top of the opposing front stone. "Elbow in! Lift them baith! And lie yersel'. I'm thinkin' ye hae't!" keenly eyeing the running stone slipped firmly from the deft hand of Matha. "Ay! Oot wi' them! There!" he cried triumphantly as the back stones flew away and Matha's lay safely on the tee. "Man, you're on the very snuff! Y'er a pat-lid, man!" he shouted to grinning Matha at the far end of the ice.

It was now Wattfield's turn to play. Whistlewood had great confidence in Wattfield. "Just crack an egg on the back o' Matha's stone, Wattfield!" he cried. "And you'll lie shot! Give me your inturn! There!" when he saw the stone

leave Wattfield's hand. "Sweep a wee, Ranal-stane! That's it! That's it!" (marking closely the running stone.) "Fine! Bonnie! Thanks, Wattfield!" he roared as the stone changed places with Matha's winner, moving it its own width back. "Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Weel, Matha!" called the shepherd, "Wattfield's stane lies a wee ahint the snuff! Gie me a



*"Come awa' wi't! Ye'r weak, man! Sweep it! Soop, Tam!
Keep it runnin', Wullie! Soop, ye dotterals, soopl!"*

canny draw till't!" holding the edge of his broom on Wattfield's stone. "Jist tee-high, mind! Come awa' wi't!" he yelled, as the stone fell limp from Matha's hand. "Ye'r weak, man! Soop, Tam! Soop! Sweep it! Keep it runnin', Wullie! Soop! Soop, ye dotterals! Dod, man, ye've gairded

their stane! What ails ye, man?" he shouted disgustedly, with elbows cocked out like the wings of a fighting cock.

"Half guard their stane, Wattfield!" cried Whistlewood in a happy mood, "back aboot there!" Wattfield played. "Man, I like ye!" (peering at the running stone). "Ay, man!" (with satisfaction). "Just where I wanted you!" he roared as the stone stopped. "There's something, now, for Wull tae crack at!" (swinging his broom exultingly in the frosty air).

The shepherd carefully viewed the stones on the tee from every point of the compass, and when he reached the far end to play, he laid off his heavy plaid. Eyeing the game from the hack he cried to Matha, his vice-skip, "I canna see a bit o't, Matha! An' no' enough o' oor ain stane tae lift it fair."

"Weel," answered Matha, "tak' aff the gaird wi' yer first stane!"

The shepherd played.

"Oh! ye'r wide, William! Ye'r wide!" cried Matha, turning away. "Ye'r awa' tae the snaw, man," he called provokingly as William's stone wobbled by into the snow bank.

"Dod, man, I lost ma fit!" cried the shepherd excusing himself. "Wha cut oot thae wee bit hackies?" frowning down at the ice under his feet.

There was a pause in the game while the shepherd knelt down and cut a slash out of each end of the hack with his big pocket-knife.

"Weel, Wattfield, what are ye wanting?" Whistlewood called down as he took the shepherd's place, and fixed his foot into the enlarged hack.

"Give me your out-turn," answered Wattfield. "And curl yoursel' in behind our guard, there! Now, man, keep your eye on my broom!"

"Is that no' too wide a borrow?" asked Whistlewood.

"Well, try that," returned Wattfield, cocking his broom and turning it over flat on the ice a foot closer to the tee. "Don't meddle wi' the guard, mind!"

Whistlewood let his stone go with a steady aim.

"Well laid down!" cried Wattfield. "Sweep a little! Ranalstane! Stop now! That's enough! Leave it to me. *There!*" he cried with a ringing voice, as the stone came winding in. "Just where I wanted you. I knew you could do it! Man! that was a bonnie curl!"

"And weel covered!" answered Monkland, looking back over his shoulder.

"That looks gy bad for us, Matha!" cried William from the far end. "What will ye hae?"

"I think you can draw to the tee yet," answered Matha, "if ye dinna slip yer fit! Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha-!" . . . Matha was a loud laugher.

"Just draw tee-high to my broom, wi' yer elbow in, William! That's like it!" he cried, when the stone left the shepherd's hand. "Sweep, Tom! Watch't! Sweep now! Yir-r-r- comin' fine!— Sweep! Soop it! There! Ye have it, man. Ye

have it! Richt on the snuff. Hurray! Ay, but yir-r-r a grawnd curler, Weeliam! Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha!" And Matha's laughter rang through the woods like the file-firing of rifles.

The shepherd came smiling down the rink on the half trot, tapping his mull and using snuff wastefully. Whistlewood and Wattfield talked seriously together at the hog-score, afterwards calling to one another from the rink ends.

"Is that the only chance, think you?" cried Whistlewood.

"Ay, and three stones to lift, mind!" answered Wattfield, "all at an angle. You're in fine fettle the day, Whistlewood, and I think you can do it! Give me your in-turn. Aboot there!" cocking his broom on the ice. "A little more than tee-length. If you touch the cheek o' the back stane you'll wamble them up, change places wi' the shepherd's stane, and lie shot. Steady, now! Steady, man! There!" he cried in high hope as the stone slipped gracefully from Whistlewood's hand. "Plenty in it, Ranalstane, I think! Follow it lads! Sweep! Sweep! Up brooms! Sweep now! Sweep! There!" waving his broom when the stone struck.

"A great shot, Whistlewood!" he cried. "It's close!" (looking down at the stones) "but I think we have it. Measure them, William."

The shepherd knelt down and measured them with the handle of his broom.

"Aich-ay! It's yours by half an inch, Whustlewood," he said, with a sigh as he rose.

And the first recording nicks on the broom handles were cut for the Free Kirk.

* * * * *

The game went merrily on all through the cold, bright afternoon, the curlers nipping oat-cakes and sipping "Glenlivet" between ends, the woods ringing with the echoing cheers of the curlers as the tide of battle rose and fell.

At the last end, sides were even; and the game began rather loosely. To wit: "Tak' that stane oot, Tam!" cried William (with his broom resting on the only stone in the ring).

Crouching Tom glowered down the rink with a blinking eye, and waving his arm, "Gie me the borrow," he answered, "an' I'll tak' them-hic-baith oot!" Needless to say, Tom's stone angled away to the snow bank.

The remaining players braced up for a keen finish. William had two stones within the inner ring, both well guarded, when the skips went down to play their final shots. Whistlewood's nearest stone lay on the outside ring, to the right of the tee.

"Weel, Wattfield," cried Whistlewood, rather dolefully, from the far end, "that looks unco' bad! What if I try an in-wick off that stone of ours oot by yonder?"

"I was thinkin' o' that!" answered Wattfield. Both lairds were very serious. "If you take it about there," touching the stone with his broom, "a little running, I think you may change places

wi' ane o' them—maybe both. Mind your foot! Steady noo, man! Steady! There!" he cried as Whistlewood delivered a straight, steady, inturned stone. "That's like it, if you're no' too slow! Sweep, lads! Sweep! Sweep! That's it! Ay! A' well! Ye've taken their second and cut them oot o' ane. A fine shot, Whistlewood! But" (lowering his voice and shaking his head) "they still lie, man. They still lie!"

Both lairds were growing doubtful.

"Dear me! Dear me! Keep's a'!" panted Whistlewood, as he came running towards the tee.

"I'm thinkin' we're safe noo, William!" shouted Matha, laughing; "But, oh man, fill the ice! no' tae let them see the cheek o' the winner! Be ready, lads, wi' yer brooms!"

The shepherd, with sparkling eyes, steadied himself a long while in the hack before he slipped his keen stone down the glassy ice.

"There, man! There!" cried Matha, waving his broom excitedly. "Are ye no' weak?" eagerly watching the creeping stone. "Sweep, Willie! Sweep, Tom! Sweep! Sweep it ower. Ower wi' it. *There!*" he shouted in triumph as the slow-going stone was led to a standstill barely over the hog-score.

"That'll dae fine!" he went on, as he turned a tightly drawn lip and defiant row of teeth on Wattfield. "That's a bonnie lang gaird," he added contentedly, as he turned away from the tee, hitching his broom handle up into his arm-pit.

"Wattfield, that blocks us, man!" called Whistlewood gravely, from the far end.

"Nae fear, Whistlewood! We'll beat them yet! Do you see that?" shouted Wattfield, touching one of the stones with the point of his broom. "If you give that stone o' yours a bit chap there, and lift it a foot, it'll lie shot! Take that borrow," (carefully cocking his broom a yard from the stone). "The ice leads a wee bit on this side, mind! Now, steady, man!"

Whistlewood took a long, steady aim before he let his stone go, and, "keep's a'" it was delivered wide.

"Oh, man! you're aff!" called Wattfield in alarm. "You're by, man! By! Lost! Lost by a hair's breadth! Man! Man! Man!"

Then he lowered his broom.

Whistlewood, meanwhile, was running down behind his stone, carrying his broom in the air. When he reached the tee he stopped suddenly, looked at the stones, then at Wattfield.

"For Guid's sake, man," he said, "the Auld Kirk has it!" Then he dropped his broom also on the ice.

The happy Auld Kirk skip would now fain consume more snuff, but he tapped an empty mull.

Casting his last stone carelessly, as far as the hog-score—for he would "tak' nae risk"—the shepherd drew on his heavy plaid and came wagging down the ice with a beaming smile, to grip the kindly outstretched hand of Whistlewood.

Then the losing rink swung their bonnets and gave three rousing cheers for the Auld Kirk Curlers. Cheers were returned, doubly loud, by the winning Kirk. And the game was over.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Beef and Greens

COMING out through the manse gate, the Auld Kirk minister met William Weems returning from the curling game. The shepherd aye came smiling to the good minister with his joys.

"Well, well! William, give me your hand! Doctor Muckle has just been in, as snappy as usual, to tell me that Sandy Bamffy's wife needed me 'at once.' She's had a bad turn, wi' the birth o' her wean, poor buddy. He mentioned that you got away with the Free Kirk this afternoon. That was a victory!"

"Ay, Doctor; but it was an awfu' warse! Tig-tag frae the beginnin' tae the end o't. But I dinna come tae mention't. I jist cried in tae mak' sure o' ye for the denner. You're comin', are ye no'?" looking eagerly up in to the doctor's face.

"I'll do my best, William; I'll do my best. Sandy's to call for me. And if no ill befalls yonder; and his old mare can harstle us through the banks o' snaw and bring us back in time, I'll be at the denner. God willing!"

"Dod, man! come whether or no!" said the shepherd.

"What?" snapped the doctor in astonishment.

"We would sair miss ye at the fore-end, tae say a bit grace, man; an' gie us a word at the close o' the year! Dinna fail's, man! Dinna fail's! It nicht be our last!" (The shepherd, abashed by the break he had made through his excitement, spoke hurriedly.) Then turning on his staff, the rheumatic old enthusiast hurtled away, dotting around the shoulder of the manse hillock and down the brae, leaving the doctor standing amazed at the good elder's lapse from orthodoxy. When the doctor came to himself a moment later, and caught a glimpse of the shepherd's plaid-tails vanishing 'round the corner—"William! William!" he muttered; "I-wonder-at-you!"

Though the warm hearted doctor loved "abody," Shepherd William was the apple of his eye. And though he had also a great passion for curling, he trembled for the walls of Zion when he saw the best of his flock carried to the length travelled by William in his devotion to the sport. So he muttered again to himself, "*I maun be at that denner this nicht, to haud them doon a wee, or curlin' will be the ruin o' Drumcraigie!*"

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In the murk and glimmer of the falling night, when the wee windows in the village cottages began to flicker warm lights, and the stars to blink and twinkle in the heavens, Sandy and the minister drove, tinkling through the frosty haze, away north to see the sick wife.

All through the gloaming, daft Jock, the bellman, "Kil-link, kilinked" up and down the braes with his handbell, crying "Beef-and-Greens! Beef-and-Greens! Hi! Ho! Beef-and-Greens. Curlers a' tae the Farmers 'Inn for Beef-and-Greens! A'! A'!"



*"Beef-and-Greens! Beef-and-Greens! Hi!
Ho! Beef-and-Greens! Hi! Ho!"*

Above the din we heard the distant tooting of a bugle horn, and the merry jingle of a hundred sleigh-bells ringing through the woods. It was Davie Galbraith galloping in from Guelph with his four-in-hand mail coach. Davie had Sir Adam

Drummond and sweet young Marjorie Maitland, Sir Adam's ward, as passengers. Marjorie had come along to spend a holiday with her Aunt Cairns at Cairnrigg. And when Davie scampered over the Craigie bridge he gave his long tin horn an extra blast, and his long whip another twirl as he rounded the corner and pulled up at the door of the "Farmers' Inn."

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"Snuffy" Owen's wife, Meg, "claverin'" wi' Tweedie at the store, where she was exchanging eggs for some groceries, took the opportunity to express herself about what was going on:

"An' unco' like thing it is tae see sae mony folk o' the twa Kirks a' gawn guight ower a bit curlin' game! Wha should I see, think ye, as I cam' in by but Jock's mither hersel', stourin' by a' o' us, wi' her neb in the air? And a' because the Auld Kirk won the meal frae the Free Kirk th' day! Losh me! Sic impidence!"

"Ay, ay! Dae ye say so?" said sly Tweedie, counting the eggs. "An' what's Matha's wife sayin'?"

"Hoot! She's waur! Owen wis tellin' me she's gaun clack-clacken' up an' doon the street, sa'en it was her man did it a'! My certies! can clashy weemin no' bide at hame and haud their nippy tongues?"

"Thae eggs are gy wee, Meg! Hoo mony hae ye?"

"Sax dizzen! Ye may weel say they're wee,

Tweedie! But what can ye expect at this time o' the year? It's nae sae easy gettin' hens tae drap big eggs when their combs are frozen tae their heids! Owen packed the hoose wi' saw-dust, frae top tae bottom, but the stupid man ga'ed awa' and left the door open last week; an' the fec o' the hens lost their combs. What are ye allooin' for eggs the noo?" she asked sharply.

"I canna gie ye mair than saxpence a dizzen for thae wee bit chippies, Meg!" looking at the little eggs.

"Saxpence!" (in a high voice). "Baker Walker's gi'en seevenpence, I'm telt! So, if ye canna gie mair than saxpence for my eggs, big or wee, I'll go tae the baker!"

"A' weel, ye needna flare up! I'll gie ye seevenpence this time, no' tae loss ye. But they're awfu' wee bit eggies, thae!" gazing sullenly at the little white pile before him.

"What's yer tea?" she snapped.

"Dae ye want it mixed?"

"Na, na! The pure Hyson!"

"Fower shillings, Meg!" Tweedie answered promptly; meaning to slip her his three-shilling brand, the rascal!

"That's an awfu' price!" cried Meg. "And yer sneesin'?"

"Twa and saxpence!"

"My certies! Weel! gie me half a pund o' Hyson, an' the rest in sneesin'!" waving her hand.

And with the bargain closed she seated herself

down on Tweedie's deal chair, to continue the "claver."

"What kind o' wumman is that mither o' Jock's, Meg? She never comes tae the store. But I see her passin' by, whiles; aye brawly dressed oot!"

"I'll tell ye!" answered Meg (with a steely glint in her little eyes). "Ower a cup o' tea in oor hoose the ither nicht, crackin' aboot the men folk, I telt her Owen was the only man that ever socht me. And what dae ye think she says?

"'A' weel, Meg" she says, 'it's weel tae be you; for beauty's been my ruin a' ma life!' That's the kind o' wumman Jock's mither is, Tweedie, if ye want tae ken!" closing one eye and giving him a cunning leer with the other.

"Ha!-Ha!-Ha!-Ha! But that wasna' very complimentary to you, Meg!"

"Compilmentary! It was insultin', Tweedie, insultin'! But that's her! The hizzie!"

"And what kind o' wumman is that new neebor o' yours—Mrs. Mearns? They tell me her dochter, Jess, is tae be married next week."

"Ay, tae Geordie Fraser! I was in last nicht seein' the presents she's gettin' frae folk, a' set oot on the table beside her wee window yonder. Knives, forks, teapots, sauts, sugar-bowls, pans, an' I dinna ken what a'. But, no spunes! No spunes! And I'll tell ye what kind o' wumman Mrs. Mearns is," (leaning her elbow on the greasy counter;) "when I was comin' awa' she gaed me a dint on the shoother at the door and says: 'If ye hear o'

onybody else gawn tae gie Jess onything, Mrs. Owen, pit spunes in their heid, pit spunes in their heid!" That's the kind o' canny wumman the Mearns body is! I wish ye would gie me a wee drappie o' 'Glenlivet,' Tweedie!" waving her fat hand at him; "I'm feelin' kind o' dry the nicht."

Giggling Tweedie was always ready with his "grog;" so quickly drew a dram for Meg from the barrel. Waddling back with the tumbler in his hand he cried with a laugh: "And the laird lost the meal the day! Whistlewood woudna like tae be beaten by William, I'm thinkin', Meg? Ha! Ha!"

"I'se warrant the laird disna fash his heid and winna care a preen! He's nae sae sma'. But it scunners a body tae see the like o' them crooin' ower the likes o' him (drinking her dram). The shepherd himsel' has mair sense (smacking 'her lips). But the clash o' the ither folk fair turns ma—hic—wyme!"

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Jock, on his bell ringing rounds, had the habit of stopping his bell at intervals and raising his "cry," or singing a psalm, as he waddled along the middle of the street. If anything happened that pleased him he would strike up a psalm. Being of Auld Kirk persuasion, and on the winning side o' the game, that night he sang more psalms than he cried "Beef and Greens." Chancing to pass Tweedie's store as Meg came out, licking her lips,

he suddenly stopped his singing and stood for a moment looking at her. Meg noticed his attention and hailed him cheerily, intending to take a "rise" out of the simpleton.

"Hoo are ye, Jock? Hoo are ye, the nicht, daft mannie?" Meg was in fine humour after her "drappie o' drink."

Jock returned no answer, but moved side-long, with lowered brow, slowly over to Meg. When he was close to her he lifted his head and with a grubby finger pulled down the lower lid of one of his red eyes, and leering at her, he said "I say, Meg! I say, wumman! Dae ye see ony green in the corner o' that?

"Ouch! Ouch!" (smelling her breath). "Ta-hell-wi'-ye! Ouch! Ouch!" And, gripping his nose in his chubby fist, he ran away from her in disgust.

In a few minutes he was jerking his way round Garrat Moor's corner with his eyes on the ground, singing

"All people that on earth do dwall
Sing to the Loard with cheerfu' v'ice,"

when he met the schoolmaster coming down the brae to the curlers' dinner.

He did not see the master until he was close upon him, and taken by surprise, he stopped suddenly. An idea came into his daft head, and he whispered across the palm of his hand into the master's face:

"I say, maister, hark! Is there ony dafty folk in Heeven, think ye?"

"Oh, yes, Jock, my man!" answered the master smiling; "God's grace is sufficient even for daft folk. But why do you ask, my man?"

"I was thinkin' o' a' wheen dafty folk aye botherin' me whan I gae up and doon the toon!" scratching his tousled head under his bonnet, and rocking himself in front of the master. For Jock, (like many other folk in the world) thought most of those he met were daft; so he continued, poking his gross face again into the master's and whispering across his hand; "Listen, maister! Hae they ony whusky in Heeven, think ye?"

"Na, na! Jock! No drunkard can inherit the Kingdom above, my man!"

"Weel, tell me this, maister. What's the difference between ye'r auld school an' drunken Meg?" And here he laid hold of the master's lapel.

"I canna say, Jock! Let me go, I'm in a hurry!"

"I'll tell ye! The ane's an auld musty ink pot, an' the ither's an auld whusky stink pot!" he shouted. Then he hurried away, with his finger on the side of his nose. And presently all other sounds in the street were drowned by the clanging of his big brass bell.

Whilst the game of the day was being played over again around the beef and greens, it was the custom of the Drumcraigie Curling Club to have Angus Campbell, the laird o' Cairnrigg's Highland

Piper, stump up and down in front of the Farmers' Inn, skirling a serenade.

Angus was a big, red, hairy crofter from Skye. He was a "frichty sicht" in full kilt tog, and a dangerous man when roused, though gentle as a lamb when not meddled with. To-night Angus was discharging his annual task with solemn relish, heaving his chest and setting his pipes abir for the first skirl. Around Jardine's corner came daft Jock, clanging his bell vigorously, altogether unmindful of a batch of boys who were covering his chunky back with armfuls of snow.

The squeal of the bagpipes and the sight of Angus always stung Jock to jealousy, arousing some abusive outburst. So, bustling past this night, when the pipes were in full scream playing "Bonnie Laddie, Heeland Laddie!" Jock gripped his bell by the tongue of it, and howled at the offending Angus:

"Ow! Ow! Ta-hell-wi' yer-bag-o'-wind-whistles, ye wratch! Ga hame and pit yir ugly shanks in breeks, ye Heelan' deevil! Ow! Ow! Clur-r-r-rk! Clur-r-r-r-rk! Zin-n-n-n-n-ng! In-n-n-n-n-ng!" he yelled, with his thumb on the side of his nose.

Then he scuttled away in high dudgeon, his hard frozen boots going clickety-click-click along the street, and clunk-clunk, as he shuffled down the three steps that led into his mother's wee housie on Provost's Road.

The enraged and insulted Angus roared after vanishing Jock:

"Tae ta teevil yersel', ye stinkin' sheeps!" And turning to the onlookers he hissed:

"It iss the Whustlewood laird an' Sir Trummond's nanesell that she'll be pipin' for this nicht, whateever! And it iss onie sax mens in Trumcraigie she'll fecht, that will be sa'en what for no'!"

And the proud, puffing piper, with lifting knees, stumped up and down, bulging his red face, and raxing his bag to the bursting point, as he skirled his Highland pibroch.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A Rousin' Splore

BY EIGHT o'clock the couthie curlers, in full muster, were snugly ensconced at dinner in the long room of the Farmers' Inn.

Sir Adam Barclay Drummond, President of the club, sat at the head of the first table; with William, Matha, the laird of Blacklockie, and Tom Todd in the place of honour on his right; and the lairds of Whistlewood, Irvie, and Ranalstane, on his left. McWhirter, the schoolmaster, sat at the other end of the table, with the lairds of Wattfield, Glenfergie, and Monkland, and the Rev. Dr. Langmuir on his right; and Doctor Muckle and the laird of Cairnrigg on his left.

Among others ranged around the tables were the lairds of Glenallen, Killehaugh, Cadenhead, Burnbank, Aldersyde, Valentyne, Glengordon, Glenweir, Drysdale, Beldsyde, Foxbar, Kinnlettes, Dinwoodie, Braeanders, Buist, Dungarvin, and Rennimuir, descendants of long lines of distinguished ancestry. And, assured of their lineage, they all sat at their ease, cracking jokes and flipping quibs of social banter across the beef and greens. In their swallow-tailed coats, brocaded waistcoats, high shirt-collars, and swaths of silk about their necks, the lairds looked indeed a "byordnar" set o' gentry.

When piper Angus was dismissed from his beat, the table-cloth removed and the glasses set, Sir Adam rose amid a storm of cheers.

"My dear friends and fellow curlers," he said, "I have to thank you for your cordial reception; such a reception as I invariably receive from you on my return from time to time to Drumcraigie. Although my duties in the country's Legislative Council engage so much of my time at this season of the year, that I am denied the enjoyment of meeting you around the tee, as I oft fain would, yet, be assured, my heart is aye with you. I rejoice greatly in the prosperity of our settlement, and in the continued well-being of our Curling Club, the pioneer club in Canada of the grand old Scottish game."

After further remarks of a general nature, he said:

"Let me ask you, as befitting this occasion, before proceeding with the night's festivities, to join with me in silently drinking to the memory of my late esteemed friend, the Father of the Club, who, full of years and good deeds, has passed beyond since last we met."

All the curlers, with the exception of those of the family of the late laird, rose, and in subdued tones pronounced the name of the "Laird of Craighead," and drank.

Wattfield then rose and said: "Sir Adam and brother Scots! On behalf of Dungarvin, Whistlewood, Blacklockie, McWhirter, Glenweir, and myself, I desire to thank you for this tribute of esteem

offered to the memory of the late lamented head of our family. Since the day when Sir Adam and Craighead first blazed their way through the wilderness to the Craigie river, these two—the founder of Drumcraigie and the founder of our Curling Club—have been constant, familiar friends, through storm and sunshine. I humbly return you our heartfelt thanks."



THE LAIRD OF CRAIGHEAD

During the interval that followed, the lairds' snuff-boxes glinted and jinked about the tables, and, amid snorts and snuff and the flutter of bandannas, Erskine Blair, the young son of Whistlewood, entered and handed a folded note to his father.

"Hae," the laird said, handing the paper back after reading it, "show it to Sir Adam."

The note read:

"My dear Gudeman—

"Mary's keen tae hae Ertie tak'
her for a drive to-night behind Prince,

as far as Irvie, and back by Elora and Kinnetts. And we would a' be happy if Marjorie Maitland could join them, if the dear girlie is no' too wearied after her long journey. That is, if Sir Adam is willing, and Mrs. Cairns disna object.

"Prince is gy frisky, but there's nae fear. Ertie can manage him fine.

"Your ain gudewife,

"Jean."

While Sir Adam read the note the burly callant standing before him was the subject of whispered comment amongst the lairds.

"That's a cheild o' pairts!" remarked the minister over his shoulder to the master; "and a handsome, sturdy lad for sixteen."

"Ay, man; he's comin' on fine!" replied the master. "What's in the wind, think ye? Whistlewood's takin' snuff terribly!"

Sir Adam looked up kindly at Ertie, (as his mother liked to call him). "This is very thoughtful," he said, "and so like your mother, Erskine. Give her my greetings. I shall be glad indeed to have Marjorie enjoy a drive with you if she feels fit, and if Mrs. Cairns has no objections. Express my desire to them at Cairnrigg, my lad; and if you go, I wish you a pleasant spin. But you'll need to be careful of the snow banks. And keep a tight rein on Prince, mind! Ha! Ha!"

"Yes, Sir Adam! But I fear I have been very rude, breaking in upon your evening in this way!" said the manly boy.

"Not at all! Not at all!" replied Sir Adam, briskly. "I am delighted to see you, Erskine; and to have this opportunity of congratulating you upon your continued success at school. I wish you a happy New Year, my lad, and pleasant holidays!" shaking hands cordially.

* * * * *

When it was known that Marjorie Maitland had come from Burlington with Sir Adam, there was a pleasant little flutter in the Blair family at Whistlewood. Erskine's sister, Mary, was Marjorie's constant companion when Marjorie visited Drumcraigie, and Mary was full of anxiety to rush post-haste over to Cairnrigg to see her friend.

"Hae patience, Mary!" said Mrs. Blair calmly; "I have a plan in my heid, if Ertie's no' too tired when he comes in frae the threshing."

Just at that moment Erskine came striding in through the door, his shock of brown hair and his heavy eyebrows and eyelashes black with smut.

"Oh! Ertie," cried his sister delightedly; "do you know Marjorie has come with Sir Adam?"

"Has she?" (smiling). "Then you'll be very happy, dear, I'm sure!" turning his back to the fire, spreading his legs proudly, and setting his arms akimbo.

"You will be tired, Ertie?" said his mother enquiringly, "after your hard day's work!"

"Not the least tired, Mother. I feel fine!" flinging himself into an easy chair beside the fire. "But we have put in a day's work of it, to be sure. We cleaned up Blacklockie's barn 'brawly,'—as Glenfergie said."

"Hoo did the crop turn oot?" asked Mrs. Blair.

"Fine! At least the laird's satisfied, and that means a good deal. Certainly, five hundred bushels of wheat, six hundred of oats, and over two hundred of barley from fifty acres, is not to be sneezed at!"

"Oh! that's excellent! I hope our crop will turn oot as weel! Gang awa' tae yer room noo, Ertie, an' get yersel' cleaned up. I'll hae a cup o' tea ready for you when ye come doon."

"I'm not the least hungry, Mother, dear. The laird gave us a fine set-out before we left. But" (glancing into the mirror over the mantel) "I'd certainly be none the worse of a scrubbing. My head looks like one of Foxbar's bestormed pea stacks!" pushing his fingers through his bushy pow.

When Erskine came down, the teapot steamed on the table beside some crisp oat-cakes and mellow cheese; and the three of them drew in and sipped and nibbled, and "had their crack."

"What posts had you and the rest at the work th' day, Ertie?" asked his mother.

"I cut the sheaf bands at the feeding board.

The laird fed the machine—shaking the sheaves into the hungry mouth of it; and, I can assure you, he kept us all hustling, ‘Come on! Come on!’ he kept roaring above the din.

“And ‘Hip! Hip!’ he shouted every few minutes to Bob Morris behind him on the horse power. Glenfergie growled—bossing the men on the mow. Irvie cursed the men on the straw stack. And Dungarvin and Glenallen measured the grain and handed it to the men to carry to the bins. Prince would have no exercise to-day, Mother, I suppose?” he said, changing the subject.

“No! Quintin’s been kept busy runnin’ back and forrit to the curlers a’ day,” answered the mother.

“Well! I’ll need to give him a spin before bedtime. How did the game go?”

“The Auld Kirk won the meal by one shot!” replied Mary.

“Did the shepherd win?” (with a sudden start). “Well! well! That will please Blacklockie! ‘Here’s tae the shepherd!’ he kept crying to-day as he passed the bottle. I suppose father’s gone down to see about the dinner? Blacklockie, and the whole lot of them, are to be there! I expect they will have a night of it!” rising, and reaching for his cap.

“Whaur are ye gaun?”

“I’m for a skate on the Beaver’s Dam, Mother. Will you come along, Mary?”

“Guidness, Ertie! Are ye gaun to wear yersel’ oot?” cried his mother kindly.

"Oh, no, Mother, dear!" laughing; "I just want to take the stiffness out of my bones. Come along, Mary!"

"I'll make a bargain, Ertie," said his sister; "I'll go with you if you will take me with you for a drive when we come back!"

"Certainly, if you care to go. But Prince is pretty wild, mind you!"

"I won't be afraid, with you!" she answered, smilingly; for Mary would trust herself anywhere with her stout-hearted brother.

"Ah!" he replied in a deep-toned voice; "on with your things, then, girlie, and let's off!"

"What think ye, bairns, o' asking Marjorie to gang wi' ye?" questioned the planning mother.

"To skate?" said Erskine abruptly.

"No, Ertie, for the drive!"

"Oh! that would be lovely!" cried Mary, clapping her hands.

"Nonsense, Mother!" returned Ertie impatiently. "Marjorie would be frightened to death behind Prince. Besides, she is not the only one to be consulted on the matter. Mrs. Cairns' consent would have to be given. And Mrs. Cairns wouldn't think of allowing Marjorie to go driving without Sir Adam's approval. It's too late to think of it! Come along, Mary; and after our skate we will have a dash together behind Prince."

"I really would like you to invite Marjorie, Ertie," said his mother, seriously, "and if you will

take a note to your father at the inn he will speak to Sir Adam."

"Oh, well," answered the boy, slowly. "I can't oppose you, Mother." He saw that her heart was set upon the idea. "Write the note, dear, and I'll run down with it. But I think it will be a fruitless errand."

There was not a girl in Drumcraigie whom Erskine could not have won, had he wished. But he was no girls' boy. He preferred the company of boys, men, or horses. Mrs. Blair, like all good mothers, knew however, that a day must surely come when her idol of a boy would turn his thoughts toward some sweet lassie; and Marjorie Maitland lay close to her heart. And if Erskine and the sweet, wealthy ward of Sir Adam Barclay Drummond could be drawn together, "would that no' be worth while?" she thought.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Shepherd Speaks

WHEN Erskine had left the Farmers' Inn, Sir Adam again rose and addressed the curlers.

"The toast I now give you," he said, "is one that appeals to the hearts of all true Britons the world over. But to none does it appeal more strongly than to a gathering of Scottish curlers. We all uphold the Crown; and rejoice in our sovereign. The surprising strength and dignity young Queen Victoria has shown in the performance of her responsible duties during these stirring years, give richest promise of a long, happy, and prosperous reign. (Applause.) I have now the honour to give 'Our beloved Queen'. God bless her!"

"Our Queen! God bless her!" was repeated around the room, and, led by the master's clarion voice, all, standing with uplifted glasses, sang "God save the Queen."

"We have now come to the toast of the evening," said Sir Adam, "and I ask you to fill your glasses and drink to the health and long life of our aged friend and fellow-curler; who so gallantly carried the Auld Kirk flag to victory to-day. (Cheers). To win a game from the deft hand of the laird of Whistlewood is no light work at any time; and with the strong support the laird had in his Free

Kirk rink—composed of my friends Randalstane, Monkland, and Wattfield—was indeed a victory for shepherd William and his Auld Kirk rink. Here's to the shepherd!"

"The shepherd! The shepherd!" cried the curlers, as they sprang to their feet, clinked their glasses, and drained their drams. Following this, they all broke spontaneously into a roaring rant with the "Curlers' Chorus":

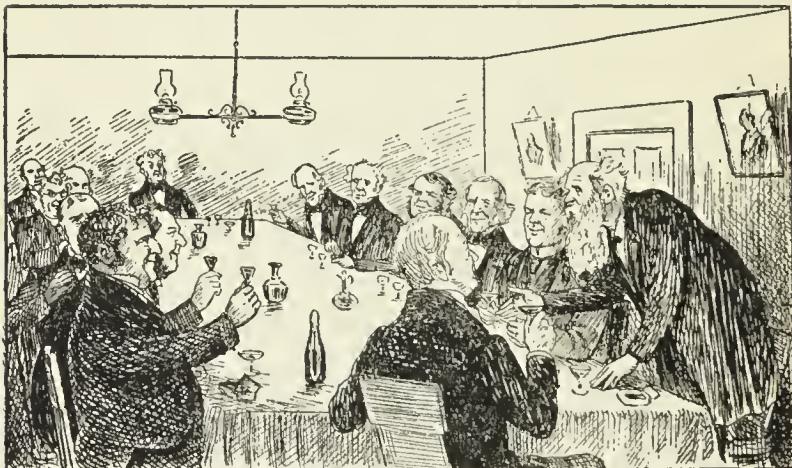
"Hurray! for the curlin',
Here's tae the curlin',
Hip, hip, hurray! for the game wi' the stanes;
Hurray for the ring o't,
The roar and the ring o't,
Hurray! hurray! for the besom and stanes!"

"Hurray! for the curlin',
Here's tae the curlin',
Hip, hip, hurray! for the game wi' the stanes;
Hurray for the birr o't,
The whirl and the whir o't,
Hurray! Hurray! for the besom and stanes!"

"Hurray! for the curlin',
Here's tae the curlin',
Hip, hip, hurray! for the game wi' the stanes;
Hurray for the ding o't,
And hail-fellow swing o't,
Hurray! Hurray! for the besom and stanes!"

"Sir Adam Drummond, and freends!" the shepherd said on rising, "I hae tae thank ye! I'm

gettin' gy auld, and gy stiff; an' ye ken I'm no guid at speakin'. The tapple-tursie o' wark has been maist mine a' my days; wi' a day's play noo and then, at gowf in summer an' curlin' in winter! And o' a' the mony games I hae had pairt since comin' tae this country, th' day's game cap's a' for rale curlin'! The ice was fine, and the drawin'



"We hae authority for't. Ay, the hicht o' authority, the warrant o' the scripture itsel'!" ("Oh! Oh! Canny, William, Canny, man!" cried the minister)

grawnd! And o' a' the shots for steady winnin', gie me a canny draw! I'll no misca' a frisky rin whiles, if we could a' dae't like Whustlewood, or Matha here." ("Hear, hear!" shouts Matha, laughing). "An' let me tell ye, there wer' na mony chips or wicks missed by either o' them th' day. The game was oor's at the end o't, tae be sure; but

wi' naethin' tae brag o'! Anither hair breidth, an' the Free Kirk wud be sittin' here, an' us ower there th' nicht!

"There's nae game like curlin'! An' noo that I'm on my feet, an' yer a' here, minister an' a', I would like tae say a word mair o' the game in general. (Applause).

"We hae high authority for't—Ay, the hicht o' authority—the warrant o' the Scripture itsel'!" ("Oh! Oh! Canny William. Canny man!" cried the minister). "Ay! minister, and I'll gie ye the chapter for 't; and ye ken I'm no' what ye can ca' flichty wi' the Word.

"Ye ken what the Preacher says in the Book o' Ecclesiastes, whar he speaks o' ploys tae be dune in time and season. He says 'there is a time to gather stanes and cast them awa'; a time to win, and a time to lose, a time to laugh, and a time to mourn.' (Laughter, cheers and "Hoot, man!" from the minister.)

"I'll no' affront ye haudin' doonricht steedfastly that the ploy o' the folk then wi' their stanes wis curlin'—as we ca' it; but it can be argied! ("Hear! hear!" cried Foxbar. "Ha! Ha! Ha!")

"Here or there, it was dootless some halesome tulzie the folk were at; and it might as weel be curlin' as no'. For ye ken hoo we laugh and mourn, as the games gang!

"It's an honest, couthie game, curlin', that we Kirk folk are a' the better o' takin' a spel at whiles. And, forby, there's muckle o' life tae

learn fra't. We a' ken the slips and fa's in't; the chancy shots an' a' that; when ower muckle elbow is gi'en a stane and it's gawn birlin' through the hoose, a waif strae will whiles grip the bottom o't an' drag it tae a stop on the snuff. Ye've a' seen that! ("Hear! Hear!")

"Anither stane cast aslant will whiles loss its turn an' come in shank-shaped tae the very bit. But anither stane cast exactly tae the broom, will'na come near the bit; but screw awa' tae the side; twisted there wi' a bit dirt on its bottom. (Ay! Ay!) An' whiles the maist carefu' o' curlers will slip his foot oot o' the hackie an' spoil a'! (Laughter, with a sigh from the minister as he helped himself to a pinch of snuff from Wattfield's box.)

"Thae things a' happened th' day. An' it's my belief that sic mishaps are aye gawn on ilka day in the game o' life. As Bobbie Burns says: 'The best laid plans o' mice an' men gang aft agley!' Ay, dae they! A briskie callant will coort a bonnie lass, an' build his castles in the air, only tae be telt when he speers the lassie that she's gawn tae ither airts! Hae ony o' you had that waesome doonfa'? (Laughter; and "No' often enough!" from Doctor Muckle.)

"On yer farms ye plow and sow. The rains come, an' the corn soon spreads its wavy green coverin' ower the fields. Ye rise ilka morning an' watch the heids o't breakin' through between the lang leaf, an' ye begin tae count the bushels tae the

acre. When, a' in a nicht, doon claps a black frost, and a' ye'r crops an' hopes are withered thegither. ("No' often noo!" said Blacklockie, having his threshing in mind.)

"No' sae often; but whiles! Dootless we'll hae nae summer frosts when we clear awa' the woods an' drain the swamps; but I'm gi'en ye this as an example o' the uncertainty o' mony things forby curlin'!"

"And ye ken, in the field o' battle; hoo that impudent upstart, Bonaparte, wis warsted at Waterloo! ("Dem-him!" muttered Irvie.) There wis nae differ' tae speak o', ye might say, in the strength o' the armies on the twa braes; an' the braw, bold birkie thocht he was aye tae win his games. But the rain clooods that he didna' coont on, weeped ower him a' the nicht afore, soakin' the grund doon-by whaur he was tae fecht; an' his heavy horse and guns, ye mind, had tae struggle in the glaur a' the fore-end o' the day o' the brulzie. An' ye ken what happened! (Loud cheers.)

"I'm no' sa'en the scoondrel wad'na hae got his skelpin' frae us, whither or no'! ("Hear! Hear!") But it's weel tae learn that that's the wy o't; that there's aye misfortunes tae forecast in ither things forby curlin'. And we should aye be ready for a' mishaps; for days o' murk, an' days o' smoor, an'—aich ay!—for the day o' a' days; oor last day. ("Ay! Ay!" sighed the minister.)

"Ay, freends! like the game o' curlin', the game o' life is a chancy struggle at best," (wiping his

brow, and blowing his nose into his bandanna). "In the buddin' time o' oor youth we are a' fu' o' hope. A' is bricht! In the middle o' the game we meet wi' disappointments. We fecht for breid. We wrangle. We play pranks. An' we chase bubbles. Near the end o't; in the glimmer o' auld age; we dream dreams o' the games we hae played. And at last we a' slip mysteriously awa', to forgather aroond the *Great White Tee* abin! An' oor bit place here is kent nae mair for ever.

"Noo that I've cleared ma whustle awee wi' this bit ramblin' crack, I'll gie ye my favorite sang:

" 'I'm wearin' awa' Jean, like snaw-wreaths in thaw,
Jean,
I'm wearin' awa' tae the Land o' the Leal'."

The shepherd sang the song through to the end; then, wiping his brow, he sat slowly down amid the ringing applause of the curlers.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Kirk and Sport

AT THE call of Sir Adam, the laird of Whistlewood then sang, in great voice:

"Is there for honest poverty
That hangs its head, an' a' that,"



WHISTLEWOOD

rousing the curlers to the utmost enthusiasm until, with upraised glasses, all united in the grand prophetic chorus;

"It's comin' yet, for a' that,
When man to man the warld o'er
Shall brithers be, for a' that!"

The laird of Wattfield followed with his favourite recitation:

“There was a sound of revelry by night,
And Belgium’s capital had gathered then
Her beauty and her chivalry.”

When he reached the lines,

“And wild and high the Cameron’s gathering rose!
The war-note of Lochiel, which Albyn’s hills
Have heard, and heard, too, have her Saxon foes;”

Blacklockie and Irvie, bethinking themselves of the gallant deeds of their own forefathers, linked hands across the table in a firm, sympathetic grip. And when the last line of the poem was declaimed, in Wattfield’s richest tones, a great burst of cheering shook the rafters of the Farmers’ Inn.

The master, who had taught all in Drumcraigie how to sing, how to work, and how to fight when need arose, then gave, in ringing notes, that grandest of all battle songs:

“Scots, wha hae wi’ Wallace bled,
Scots, wham Bruce has often led,
Welcome to your gory bed,
Or to victory!”

Before the third verse was reached all the curlers were on their feet, and at the close

“Liberty’s in every blow!
Let us do—or dee!”

the most of the gathering was standing on chairs, bandannas were waving tumultuously, and the cheers that resounded again and again were like the sound of rushing wind in a forest.

* * * * *

(“My certies, but thae lairds hae the bonnie legs!” muttered “Snuffy” Owen’s wife one summer Sabbath when she met two of the lairds as she walked sadly homeward from the Kirk behind her husband’s clumsy feet and slender shanks. And the view of the finely turned ankles, and full curved calves, tightly hosed and gartered at the knee, of the lusty lairds, as they stood there in proud challenging attitude, emphasized the truth of Meg’s remark.)

* * * * *

After “Scots wha hae!” Sir Adam called the company to order and said: “We shall now have the pleasure of hearing from our two eloquent friends, the minister and the master; in response to the sentiment I am about to give. (Cheers). I ask you to raise your glasses and drink a bumper toast to the old country; and to this new country; and to the health and long life of the minister, and the master!”

Glasses jingled and clinked again as the word went around the board: “The old country and the new. The minister and the master!”

"My dear Sir Adam Barclay Drummond; and brithers a' of the Drumcraigie Curling Club!" the minister began, amid a clatter of snuff boxes, snorts and applause. "I have to thank you for coupling my name with the toast you have just honoured!

"I shall not keep you long, nor shall I make any reference to the old country, nor to this new country. That may well be left to the eloquent master. What I will try to say will be a word of reference to the ancient sport you were engaged in this day. ("Hear, hear.")

"I know of no enjoyment, for the recreation of rational Christian men, to compare with the grand old Scottish game of curling. Socially, all men are level around the tee! And in this new settlement, I am glad to say, curling has encouraged pleasant companionship between all classes; and has done much to promote good fellowship and all the kindred Christian virtues in our midst. ("Hear! Hear!")

"But while I say that, my dear friends, I would also warn you never to forget that, while there is a time and season for all things—as the shepherd has noticed—it is incumbent upon us all, at all times, to do all things in moderation! I cannot complain, I think, of any over-indulgence in Drumcraigie!" ("Hear! Hear!" growled cynical Doctor Muckle, amid general laughter.)

"That's ower muckle for Doctor Muckle's crop!" cried Tom Todd, giggling.

"It's nae very muckle that wad be ower muckle for Doctor Muckle in th' wy o' curlin', I'm thinkin'!" echoed Martha Spiers.

"Fa's finin' fa't wi' curlin', Martha?" snapped the



"I cannot complain, I think, of any over-indulgence in Drumcraigie!"

Doctor. "It's a' wheen indulgences at the tail end o't I had in mind!" taking snuff from Cairnrigg's box.

The minister went on: "Our friend the Doctor

likes his joke! I only wish he would turn out and tak' a curl with us whiles. I'm sure it would do him good! ("Hear! Hear!")

"I was about to say that our brunts and trials of everyday life in this work-a-day back settlement demand that we should enjoy relaxation in season. And, much as I love my own work here, I must confess to an inordinate passion for an occasional turn with you on the ice! (Applause.) On my way to the Presbytery meeting this afternoon; when, through the cedars I 'smelled the powder afar off,' ("Snuff!" sneered Doctor Muckle.) and heard 'the thunder of the captains, and the shouting,' I was sorely tempted to take to the woods, and break my way through to the Beaver's Dam. (Applause.) But, with a stiff upper lip, and a firm foot, I managed to hold to the road.

"Accidents do indeed often give our everyday affairs an unexpected turn, just as they do in the game of curling—as William has so well expressed it. The smallest unlooked-for circumstance may determine our destiny. Therefore it becomes us ever to be humble; for we cannot tell what may chance; nor can we take measurement of the great game that is, if I may so speak, guided by the Hand behind the veil. But I must not enlarge. ("Gae on! gae on!" cried the curlers.)

"No! I only meant to say a word or two; and I will now give way, for I know you want to hear the ringing voice of the master as he tells of the auld, and says something of this new land that we

are all wrestling with here. I would fain go on a wee; but I must stop; contenting myself with wishing you, one and a', much happiness in all your games and activities here, and happiness ever-more!"

And with this the kind-hearted minister resumed his seat, amid hearty applause.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Schoolmaster out of School

LOUD cheers greeted the master's rising, and very soon his stentorian tones were rolling over the gathering like the music of tumbling waters. He was a worshipper of Burns, and fond of interlarding his speeches with long quotations from the poet; but these were always apt, and readily acceptable, particularly to such a company as were gathered in the Farmers' Inn on the present occasion.

"Sir Adam, and brither Scots!" he began, in quiet, serious tones, "it becomes us, when gathered together on occasions like this, to refresh our memories by recalling some of the scenes of our early boyhood days, and of the associations of our early youth in the old land of our birth. A proper veneration for our 'auld hame' makes us nane the less devoted citizens of this new, bright home of our adoption. (Applause.)

"Love for one's country is a sentiment deeply rooted in the breasts of all good men. And in none is it more firmly implanted than in the hearts of Scots the world over! A man without that 'minstrel rapture' is a stunted growth, incapable of true citizenship where'er his lot be cast. ("Hear! Hear!")

"We do well, then, as true Scots, to look back betimes to that rugged land of crag and torrent; of snow-capped ben and snuggling loch; of whispering hills, and bubbling burns; of whistling woods where feathered warblers tune their song; of the bonnie banks and murmuring streams of Afton, Teith, and Doon! (Cheers.)

" 'Oh, sweet are Coila's boughs and woods,
Where lintwhits chant among the buds,
And jinkin' hares, wi' amorous whid's
Their love enjoy.

While through the braes, the cushat croods
With wilful cry.

"We do well, too, to cherish with pride the memories of our great countrymen, past and gone—men who served their country well, in Kirk and State; not forgetful of the long line of martial heroes whose names are carved deep on Scotland's roll of fame. (Applause.)

"Ay, brither Scots, as long as we live, and where-e'er we live,

" 'We'll sing auld Coila's plains and fells,
Her moors red-brown, wi' heather bells,
Her banks and braes, her dens and dells,
Where glorious Wallace
Aft bare the gree, as story tells,
Frae southern billies! (Cheers.)

" 'At Wallace's name, what Scottish blood
But boils up in a spring-time flood?

Oft have our fearless fathers strode
Still pressing onward, red-wat shod
Or glorious died!" (Loud applause.)

"And we do well to remember our mother's knee—our mother's knee, indeed, where the principles of righteousness, justice and truth, were deeply wrought into our lives. ("Wi' a leather strap!" muttered Muckle.) That, as the magnet points always to the pole, so our hearts reached always toward the highest ideals, leaving it only for us to be true to ourselves to win the day! But to succeed we must put forth righteous effort at our several vocations, working continually, steadily, earnestly, and faithfully. The industry of Scotsmen is proverbial the world over, and I suppose that this characteristic gives us the greater relish at by-times for such manly sport as you have been engaged in this day. ("Ay! that's the wey o't!" chirped Cairnrigg, taking a pinch of snuff.)

"Dismissing further reference to our 'auld hame,' and to the game all Scotsmen so much enjoy, I would cry, in the words of the immortal Burns:

" 'O Scotia, my dear, my native soil;
For whom my warmest wish to heaven is sent!
Long may the hardy sons of rustic toil
Be blessed with health, and peace, and sweet
content!' (Hear! Hear!)

"What, now, shall I say of this wild, crisp, fertile land of our adoption?—this land of bright

sunshine, snow, and invigorating west winds? By birthright this beautiful and expansive over-the-sea-realm, too, is ours. Living here under the British flag, no aliens are we! (Hear! hear!) But pioneers from the Homeland; penetrating



"Living here under the British Flag, no aliens are we"

our own wild possessions; helping, in our humble way, to break up and roll back the dense forest; and to open the virgin soil to the fructifying heat of the sun; to build homes for ourselves, our children, and our children's children. ("Ay! wi' a curlin' stane!" growled Doctor Muckle.)

"The magnitude of these British American

possessions; their latent riches in soil, timber, and, without a doubt, minerals; extending from salt sea to salt sea across the continent; the innumerable inland oceans and rivers, encircling and interweaving the land, all teeming with life—has not yet revealed itself to our limited intelligence.

"Of the future government of this northern part of America, flying our flag from the Atlantic on the east to the Pacific on the west, and to the Arctic on the north, I shall not dare an opinion. It is too vast a problem for the wit of man to grapple from the present standpoint. But this I will aver! This sunny land we live in, this wonderful land, will ever remain part of the great realm of Britain; (Cheers.) And that, in the course of time, we may be sure some means will evolve whereby the present fragmentary executives of the country will be consolidated under the Crown; and some Central power established to govern the whole domain.

"In Drumcraigie here, in the centre of Canada, we are happily settled on the sunny side of the shed that divides the waters flowing north and south into two of our great lakes. Let us realize, then, that on these lake-surrounded Highlands, where once the wild Indian—Iroquois, Algonquin, and Huron—roamed, in the very core of the country; we have a gift from Providence, my friends, more precious than bonanzas of silver, or rivers whose sands run rich with virgin gold. (Cheers.)

"So let us, curlers a', each play the man, and

work with might and main while it is day! For myself, I love my humble share of the work, done for the most part in the log school yonder. And, if it grow weary at times, I am encouraged, ay! and abundantly rewarded, when I see your lads and lassies that I have woofed and warped from 'whips and strokes' and A.B.C. to Greek and Latin well-doing and loyal in life after they leave my care!

"Now, Sir Adam, and brither Scots, as the poet says:

" 'Nae man can tether time and tide;
The hour approaches, we maun ride!'

So I must end now. Before resuming my seat, I desire heartily to thank you for coupling my name with the Auld Kirk minister's; and with the patriotic sentiment you have so worthily honoured." (Thunderous applause.)

CHAPTER TWENTY

Irvie at his Best

SIR ADAM, after some appropriate remarks, having reference to the closing hours of the old year, surprised the gathering by calling upon the courtly, eccentric laird of Irvie.

There was an uproarious stamping of feet as the laird unexpectedly arose, and before he attempted to speak, the beams of the inn shook again with a verse of the Curlers' Chorus:

“Hurray for the curlin’,
Here’s tae the curlin’,
Hip, hip, hurray! for the game wi’ the stanes,
Hurray for the ring o’t,
The roar and the ring o’t,
Hurray! Hurray! for the besom and stanes!”

Irvie seldom spoke on these occasions because of a jerky, halting infirmity of speech. His stutter, with his irrepressible “dem-it-all!” interjected unconsciously here and there, gave his remarks an occasional turn that provoked many a merry chuckle. But no interruptions on the part of his audience ever disturbed the clever laird as he “ith-ith-ith-ith’t” and “fif-fif-fif-fif’t” along to the conclusion of what he had to say.

On the present occasion his first sentences were

choky, and difficult to follow; but as he warmed to his work his speech grew plainer, and quite exciting.

"Sir Adam, and brother cuk-cuk-curlers!" he stammered, "the 'Hurrah for the r-r-r-r-ring o't, and the r-r-roar and the rir-rir-rir-ring o't', and the nonsense, fif-fif-fif-fif-fif-for the most part, j-j-j-just spoken by the minister ("Oh! Oh!" cried Sir Adam), and the schoolmaster—dem-it-all ("Canny man!" from Doctor Langmuir), in reference t-t-t-t-to his ir-ir-ir-wretched old co-co-co-country, and his new, hard, fif-fif-fif-frost-bitten co-co-country here, is mo-mo-most deplorable! (Roaring laughter.)

"I kic-kic-kic-quite agree with Mr. Weems, the shepherd, as t-t-t-to that rascal Bonaparte, ("Hip! hip! hurray!" shouted Kinettles.) and t-t-t-to some of the shepherd's appropriate remarks about cuk-cuk-curling. But I entirely demur to—to—to—to Doctor Langmuir's doctrine of chance! There is no such thing as ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-ch-chance! (Loud laughter.) The widespread, d-d-dense ignorance of the eternal laws, and everlasting v-v-v-v-verities —dem it!—is most appalling, and pathetic, to a mind fif-fif-fif-fif-free from superstition! ("Hear! Hear!" snorted Doctor Muckle into his bandanna.)

"I also ta-ta-take the liberty to-to-to-disagree with McWhirter's d-d-d-d-d-d-d ("Canny man!" from the minister) dogma, of work-work-work, ever-lal-lal-lal-lasting work! ("Hear! Hear!" chuckled Wattfield.)

"Does he not know that one half of the human family d-d-d-d-d-do all the work that is d-d-d-done

in the world, while the other half go idle ("And mair shame i't!" said Cadenhead), wrongly deprived of their b-b-b-blessed share of it? And in consequence, cuk-cuk-cuk-causing untold misery and kic-kic-kic-crime throughout the race! ("Nae doot, nae doot!" sighed Cairnrigg, wagging his head and tapping his snuff mull.)

"I hold that ma-ma-ma-man should not be allowed to work more than si-si-six hours a day!" ("Oh! oh!" cried McWhirter.) Then all people would have their work to do si-si-si-si-six hours a day! A-a-a-a-and the rest of their God-given t-t-t-t-time they could use fof-fof-fof-for God-given pleasure, Go-Go-Go-God-given relaxation, God-given r-r-r-r-recreation, and intellectual enjoyments, dem-it-all!

"Labor should not be the main thing in lil-lil-lil-life! ("Hear! Hear!" cried Wattfield.) There are other good things in lil-lil-life besides necessary fif-fif-food, and necessary cuk-cuk-cuk—("Curling" gurgled Doctor Muckle.) covering; to-to-to-to obtain which only, we should work! And, as the poet says,

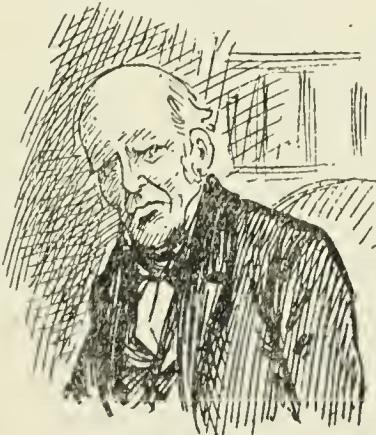
" 'Man wants but lil-lil-lil-little here below,
Nor wants th-th-th-that little long.' "

("But gy strong!" said Monkland, smiling across the table at Doctor Muckle. "Haud ye're ding-dong!" grunted the doctor.)

"We all kec-kec-kec-kec-ken the master means well! But let me tell him a fa-fa-fa-fa-fact we all

should know. Constant, sordid, lil-lil-labor, bent early and la-la-late over the midden and the ho-ho-hoe, lil-lil-lil-lowers both the body and the immortal so-so-soul of man, both of which should always have a fif-fif-fif-fresh, open, fif-fif-free up-loo-loo-look, an out-look on the glories and joys, dem-it-all, of God's creation! ("Hear! hear!" and cheers.)

"But I will not co-co-continue my observations



DR. MUCKLE

("Go on! Go on!" shouted the curlers.) except to say that I d-d-disagree entirely with McWhirter as to-to-to-to the lil-lil-lil-limited view he has taken of the fif-fif-future of this country. None of you may agree with me. But I believe the time will cuk-cuk-cuk-come when Canada will be bound up in a Union with the United States of America! (Uproar, and loud cries of "Never! Never!")

"The union I fo-fo-forecast will be one of all p-p-p-p-people on this continent ("No! No! Never! Never!" cried Foxbar), under one fif-fif-fi-flag, dem-it, ("Stop, laird! stop, man!" pleaded Sir Adam quietly), and one go-go-go-government! ("Never! God forbid!" cried the minister, turning his spectacles on Irvie.) And that fif-fif-fif-flag will be composed of the sta-ta-stars and stit-a-stripes of the States (tremendous uproar), *to-to-topped with the grand old r-r-r-r-red cross of St. George!* ("Ha!" excitement moderating.)

"Ke-ke-ke-keep calm, my friends; ke-ke-keep calm! I have no sis-sis-sympathy, as you know, with the craven co-co-coterie of annexationists in this country. ("Hear! hear!") Green grass will cuk-cuk-cuk-cover all our p-p-p-p-precious graves—dem-it-all—before this Union of America takes place! ("I'm thinkin' sae!" croaked Glenfergie, sullenly.) But, cuk-cuk-cuk-come it will, as sure as the waters run d-d-d-down the Craigie River. ("Never! Never!") And why not, lel-lel-lel-let me ask?

" 'A family rent, may j-j-j-join again,
By God's eternal law.'

("Ay, ay!" sighed the minister approvingly.) "God's law, however, is love, not fif-fif-fif-force. And this Union, when it comes, will cuk-cuk-come through self-sacrifice, and the exercise of amity and lil-lil-love. Never! never! by fif-fif-force! ("Hear! Hear! Hear!" cried Blacklockie.)

"I believe our mi-mi-mi-main mission here in Canada, as true builders of Empire, is to so bib-bib-bib-build, that our bub-bub-bumptious cousins to the south of us, who broke away, shall one day find it to be in their own interest, and in the interest of the world at la-la-large, to come ba-ba-back to us! ("Ay! that's mair like!" remarked the minister, smiling.) Then, with a wo-wo-world-wide lil-lil-lil-league of the Anglo-Celtic race, universal peace will prevail, and the time will dawn—dem-it-all!—when we may well sing,

" 'Man to man the wa-wa-warl'd o'er
Shall brithers b-b-be, and a' that!'"

Hearty cheers greeted stuttering Irvie as he sat down; then all present stood up and commenced to sing

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot,"

when Sir Adam raised his hand and called for silence.

"Before singing 'Auld Lang Syne,' my friends," he said, "I am sure we would all welcome a few remarks from our well-tried friend, the laird of Blacklockie!" (Loud hand clapping, followed by another roar of the Curlers' Chorus.)

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Blacklockie Speaks

THE LAIRD of Blacklockie did not often speak in public; but when he did, his words were well worth hearing.

"I thank you, Sir Adam and brother Scots, for honouring thus my humble name," he began, in his deep drumming voice. "I fully realize that it is no light thing for a mere man to open his mouth to express his thoughts before the men of Drumcraigie, assembled. ("Ye'r richt there, laird!" growled Doctor Muckle.)

"We are curlers a', my brither Scots! And, being curlers, we are known as true men, 'Drawn to a hair.' No chicaner can skulk about the tee, or find encampment 'round our festal board.

"Within our walls we proudly boast of freedom to speak our inmost thoughts, subjecting them to keenest scaith and scrutiny, 'chap-and-lie,' and 'guard-our-shots' as best we may, rememb'ring the while that we are brithers a', and brithers to the end. And of this freedom, which I proclaim is ours, the deliverance of our friend Irvie, is an excellent vindication. ("Hear! Hear!" from Glenfergie, and a warm rumble of applause all 'round.)

"For myself, I am a Briton! A North Briton! (Applause.) As a man my country is the wide

world! But, as William Wallace Black, I am heir by birthright to all lands owning Britain's sway! ("Ay! that's the way o't!" chirped Cairnrigg, leaning eagerly forward.) And I am proud to call Canada, this splendid, rugged, fertile plain and woodland country, here—from east to west and north to south—where Britain's flag is raised, mine, because I am a Briton. (Cheers.)

"When I remember our forefathers (sweeping his hearers with his flashing eyes) and the great structure they built and saved for us, in one long continuity of their life with ours, political and national, unbroken; encircling with the halo of their fame the round of earth; the waves of the seven seas singing songs to their hallowed memories—I feel it is good to be a Briton! (Loud cheers.)

"When I remember our ancestors, who, three centuries ago, let slip the dogs of war, and swept Spain's hell-hound squadrons from the sea; when, two centuries ago, they hurried a would-be tyrant from the throne; and laid deep and broad the solid foundation of civil and religious liberty—I feel glad that I was born a Briton!

"Remembering all the brave men who carried the British flag; that flag that represents the highest truths that ever came down from heaven to men—equal rights and freedom to all; the men who planted that glorious banner where freedom was before unknown, where justice lay trampled under foot, and where the spirit of self-sacrifice had never

lived—remembering these men, I say, I am proud indeed to call myself a Briton! (Loud cheers.) Having in mind Wallace, too, and Wellington, and Wolfe, with all they dared and won for us!

“When I look back to the long line of Scotsmen, Englishmen, Welshmen, and Irishmen, who reared our British realm, who set on foot great nations yet to be within the realm; in North America, in South Africa, in New Zealand, and in Australia; the men who raised our flag, to fly over countless



BLACKLOCKIE

millions yet unborn; under whose folds freedom and right shall ever be found—personal freedom, national freedom, civil, intellectual and religious freedom—where the rights of great and small shall be ever equally sacred; where, like Judah and Israel, every man may dwell under his own vine and under his own fig tree, none daring to make

him afraid. When I think of these men, my soul swells in humble pride and gratitude. (Applause.)

“During what remains of my little span of life, my brother Britons, it will be my constant endeavour, in my humble way, to promote, by tongue and pen, the steadfast unity and solidarity of all the far-spread family of nations who enjoy the blessing of living in freedom under the British flag. All Britain One!

“ ‘One Empire, firm and free,
All one, on land and sea,
All Britain one!
One Flag! One Fleet! One Throne!
One zeal from zone to zone,
For ever one!
One Soul! One Mind! One Might!
One bulwark of the Right,
One front in every Fight—
All Britain one!’”

(Loud applause)

“Let us, then, as true Britons, go forward—not in the unworthy spirit of the disruptionists referred to, creeping and cringing; but imbued with the brave spirit of our great ancestry, standing shoulder to shoulder, that we may hand down to our children—uncontaminated and unimpaired—the splendid inheritance bequeathed to us, whatever great union of the English speaking race may, perchance, come about in the lang by-and-by.

“As for me, I shall stand for the integrity of my

Imperial inheritance and my flag, even if I stand alone, as my ancestor Wallace stood:

“ ‘Faithful found:
Among the faithless, faithful only he;
Among the innumerable false, unmoved,
Unshaken, unseduced, unterrified,
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal;
Nor number, nor example, with him
wrought
To swerve from truth, or change his
constant mind
Though single.’ ”

When Blacklockie concluded his rousing address—given in thunder tones—all stood up, and a great outburst of long continued cheering followed. Then the curlers all crossed their arms, and linked hands neighbour to neighbour. And this living chain of couthie Scots—swinging and swaying—sang out the old year and sang in the new, wi’ “Auld Lang Syne.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The Airt o' the Wind

WHEN Erskine Blair delivered his mother's invitation at Mrs. Cairns' warm inglenook, Marjorie clapped her hands and cried, "Oh! Oh! how lovely! How lovely!"

A year had passed since Marjorie had last visited Drumcraigie, a year in which the sweet maiden was fast budding into graceful womanhood; and when she saw the stalwart youth in his buckskin moccasins stride softly into the room she felt the first throb of love.

"But are you no' too tired, my darling, after your travels?" Mrs. Cairns enquired tenderly.

"Oh, no, no, Auntie. And I shall love to see Mary. How are you all at 'Whistlewood,' Erskine? And your dear Mother? I'll be ready immediately! Oh! oh!" And the warm-hearted girl bounced gleefully across the room.

"Don't hurry!" said imperturbable Erskine, in his deep-toned voice. "It will be twenty minutes till I can drive over for you. Wrap up well!"

"You maun be careful driving over the snow-drifts, Erskine!" said Mrs. Cairns anxiously, as he turned to the door.

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Cairns! I'll be very careful. You need have no fear!"

With these few words, spoken with firm self-

possession, the strident callant politely bowed himself out; and in a few minutes he was over the hill at "Whistlewood."

Whilst Quintin was busy at the barn getting the horse ready, packing clean straw into the bottom of the deep cutter, and shaking out the buffalo robes, Mrs. Blair, in the house, was warming bricks. In a few minutes Prince came prancing and snorting up to the door, under the man's tight rein.

"You'll ride over with us, Quintin, to hold his head till we all get in!" said Erskine, firmly.

"Now Ertie, laddie, do be careful," said his mother, as she fixed the hot bricks at Mary's feet.

* * * * *

The previous day was the eighteenth anniversary of Mary's birth; and, as a birthday greeting, the tender mother had addressed the following lines to her dear daughter. They reveal the hidden springs that animated that brave Drumcraigie mother:

"In health and sickness, joy and grief,
Thy mother's been thy stay,
And tried to lead thy childhood's steps,
In wisdom's sheltered way.

"May meekness, gentleness, and truth
Adorn thy youthful face;
And as thou grow'st in days and years,
Oh, may thou grow in grace!

"And when the snowy wreaths of age,
 Around my head entwine,
May thou attend my feeble steps,
 As once I 'tended thine!"

"And when I leave this vale of tears,
 Where hearts too oft are riven,
Dear Mary, keep the narrow path,
 That we may meet in Heaven!"

Mrs. Blair had perfect confidence in her big boy; but, like all good mothers, she never failed to give a parting word of warning when the children left her door.

"You can depend on me, Mother!" said confident Erskine, taking up the reins. "By-bye, dear!" they cried, and off they dashed, jingling in the moonlight, round the curve between the overhanging trees, through the gate, round the corner, and down the sloping brae.

"Hold him, Quintin!" Erskine said quietly, as they both jumped out at "Cairnrigg" door on the opposite brae-side.

"Steady, Prince! Steady, lad!" said nervous Quintin, gripping the bridle and patting the neck of the snorting gelding.

In a few minutes the three were snugly tucked into the sleigh between the warm buffalo robes. Mary occupied the front seat with her back to the horse, facing Marjorie, who sat beside Erskine. The girls wore coon fur cloaks and mink fur hoods. Erskine was wrapped in a buffalo skin overcoat.

With so much fur about them, and with the warm bricks in the straw at their feet, they were very cosy in their little low sleigh.

"By-bye, Mrs. Cairns!" the laughing girls cried, waving their hands.

"Let him go, Quintin!" said Erskine.

And away they sprang, whizzing and ringing down the brae, over the bridge, and up the Owen Sound Road.

Of the many sweet and beautiful girls in and about Drumcraigie, Mary Blair of Whistlewood was one of the sweetest; but none had the ingenuous charm and gleeful ripple of Marjorie Maitland. And when Marjorie came to "Cairnrigg" for a holiday, most of the lads' heads in the settlement were turned topsy-turvy.

The two girls sang merrily as they glided swiftly up the road. Prince, revelling in his work, galloped knee-deep past home-going teams on the way, scattering clouds of dry snow, that whirled away in the wind.

"Whoa, Prince! Whoa, my boy!" Erskine kept coaxing as the sleigh swerved and swayed out and back into the glistening track; "Whoa, my boy!"

On they dashed through the drifts, ringing and singing. Past "Glenallen," "Cadenhead," "Blacklockie," "Rennimuir," and down the narrow road between the deep pine woods. Through the maple glen at "Glengordon," through the open gate at "Irvie," and up the long drive between the tower-

ing elms—cheering and jingling, they swung at a gallop round the circle of trees in front of the rubble-stone house, and pulled up at the broad porch sheltering the front door.

"Whoa, Prince! Steady, boy; steady!"

Then they all jumped out in a glow from between the warm robes.

Archie, the laird of Irvie's man, was at the head of the spirited horse in a moment, and led him away snorting to the barn, whilst Mrs. Irving welcomed the happy visitors at the open door.

"Oh, how lovely!" cried the impetuous Marjorie. "Delightful!" echoed Mary, both girls bouncing into their hostess' motherly arms.

"My dear girls," cried the laird's hospitable wife, embracing them both, "I am so glad to see you! Come away in!" drawing them forward by the hand. "Dear me, how you have grown, Marjorie! I believe she is taller than you, Mary, dear;" looking at Mary, while holding Marjorie at arm's length. "And how have you been? The laird told me you were coming with Sir Adam, but really I did not look for this delightful surprise to-night!

"Lay off your cloaks, girlies, and come in-by to the fire. And how are you, Erskine?" turning to the handsome escort. "But that's needless to ask; for you're always fine!" shaking hands and looking up with a kind smile at the tall, proud, high-nosed boy.

"I'm very well indeed, thank you!" returned

Erskine, smiling and striding away from her across the room to assist the girls in removing their cloaks, "and I am delighted to see you so well yourself, Mrs. Irving," he said over his shoulder.

"Oh, Mrs. Irving!" cried Marjorie, "you must scold him for furious driving! I'm sure we flew those four miles in about a minute!"

"No, twenty!" corrected Erskine, gently assisting her with her cloak.

"And how we dashed past those frightened sleigh teams! I really expected to make a dive head-forward into the snow-drifts every minute!" (tucking back some vagrant locks of her wavy, golden hair, and fluttering about the room).

"Then, that would be only one dive!" said the boy, in a slow, calculating tone; "four miles in a minute. A dive every minute. One dive. H'm!" And, after removing his heavy fur coat, he took a seat at the side of the chimney, rubbed his hands, spread out his knees, slipped his fingers into his trouser pockets, and looked grandly into the blazing fire.

"And the way we came through the glen, and swung through your gate, was simply terrifying," warbled Marjorie, sitting down in an easy chair beside Mary at the opposite side of the fire. "But, oh! how lovely!" she cried, laughing, wringing her pretty fingers and waving her hands.

"Ah!" said Erskine, setting his elbows on his knees and holding his spread hands over the wood-fire.

"And how is your mother?" enquired Mrs. Irving, wheeling her chair towards Mary.

"Very well indeed, Mrs. Irving, thank you!" replied Mary, turning her beaming face toward the laird's wife. "She wished me to give you her love. She hopes to see you at 'Whistlewood' soon." Mary's sweet face told more eloquently of the welcome there, than any words could.

The little party spent a delightful, carefree time beside the cheerful fire, chatting, laughing, singing, and cracking nuts and jokes until the time came when they must think of their homeward journey.

It was almost midnight when Archie brought Prince back to the door, with harness ringing and glittering under the bright meridian moon; and very soon the three happy young folk were wrapped up and tucked back again between the robes, and away out on the road, careering homeward.

They took the road down the side-line, past "Dungarvin" and "Aldersyde," and through the long cedar swamp; and here something evil befell.

Prince's sharp-pointed ears jabbed the frosty air nervously as he entered the swamp. His wide nostrils snorted white steam in the moonlight as he stepped high and fast into the narrow, white track between the cedar trees. He scented danger ahead, and trembled. The reins quivered, but Erskine gripped them firmly and spoke kindly, "Steady, Prince! steady!" but the animal bounded forward, jumped, and sniffed the air excitedly. Both the driver and the trembling horse expected danger,

but the gladsome girls in the cutter felt no alarm whatever.

Suddenly a great snarling grey wolf leaped across the track in front of the horse's head. Prince stopped with a sudden jerk; lowered himself like a leopard about to spring; snorted in terror; reared; plunged into the deep snow; then reared again; standing for a moment almost upright. Then, gripping the bit between his teeth as in a vice of steel, the frightened horse sprang away down the narrow white lane like a gust of wind.

Though he knew full well the peril in which they stood should they encounter any obstacle in the road before them, the brave lad at the reins remained calm and undismayed, amid the battering snow-chips flung from the terrified horse's hoofs.

"Crouch under the robes, girls!" he said confidently. "Keep still and sit tight!"

Then he braced himself for a pull. "Whoa! Prince! Whoa!" he cried, and gave the reins a strong tug. But the horse's teeth remained clamped on the bit. Erskine stiffened himself and pulled again with all his might. But Prince held on. Then, winding the reins tightly around his hands and wrists, the muscular lad put forth all his strength, crying "Whoa! Whoa! Whoa, boy!" when—good God!—one of the reins suddenly snapped at the bit!

The situation was now perilous in the extreme. Erskine knew that if he pulled the other rein the horse would go crashing into the trees. And he

realized also that there remained only one thing to be done, if his precious freight was to be saved from utter wreck.

In less time than it takes to tell, the daring lad dropped the reins, threw off his fur coat, placed his foot on the dash board, and vaulted like a panther astride the terror-driven horse. He gripped the short bridle rein; twisted his feet under the animal's heart; and pulled with muscles of whipcord. And, within fifty yards, the brave lad brought Prince to a standstill only a few feet from the tail of McCarty's ox-sleigh, loaded with cordwood, crawling along ahead of him in the middle of the road.

"Steady, my boy! Steady!" said Erskine, jumping off and patting the trembling horse. "All right, girls!" he called reassuringly.

"For goodness' sake, Ertie; whatever is the matter?" cried Mary, excitedly, as she and Marjorie crept from under the robes.

"Oh, a mere trifle! I had to stop him '*manibus pedibusque,acheval.*' Steady, Prince!" he said to the still trembling horse.

"Mercy me! What's that you say? Whatever happened, Ertie?" cried Mary again.

Marjorie sat up, in a tremorless dream; her bright, beaming eyes fixed on Erskine.

"Oh! one of the reins gave way, that's all!" examining the break; "and I had to jump on his back and pull him up by the check rein. Steady, lad! Steady!"

"Oh, how lovely!" cried Marjorie, impulsively. She was referring to Erskine's exploit, of course, the dear girl. No thought of danger had crossed her mind. It was the bravery of the lad that made her innocent heart palpitate.

"M'm!" murmured Erskine, clearing his throat. He knew well what a terrible smash-up they had escaped, and would never forget the experience.

After knotting the end of the broken rein to the ring of the bridle bit, and carefully looking over the harness, Erskine led Prince past the ox-sleigh, and asked McCardy to hold the horse's head for a moment while he put on his fur coat. Then he took his seat, and away they dashed as if nothing had happened.

The merry, laughing, singing girls enjoyed the remainder of the drive homeward, through Elora and up the east bank of the river. But Erskine had some silent reflections; for, though perilous adventure was "life" to him, when the danger was past thoughts of deep seriousness took strong possession of him.

After passing "Kinlettes" and "Craighead," drawing near home, the girls stopped singing. Their voices were tired, and Marjorie turned her rosy, dimpled face up to Erskine, and whispered: "A penny for your thoughts, Ertie!"

"Ah!" he answered, "your sweet songs seem to have charmed away my speech; but I was thinkin' as Snuffy Owen would say."

"I did not know that Snuffy Owen could think,"

the girl replied. "Then I'll gie ye a penny for your thinkin' as Snuffy might say."

They were now driving around the turn in the road when Erskine asked, absently, "How long do you and Sir Adam remain at 'Cairnrigg' this time, Marjorie?"

"Oh! Sir Adam returns immediately, Ertie," replied Marjorie in gay confidence, "but I am to stay ten days! Won't that be lovely?" she cried with a sweet rising inflection.

Her winsome, face was turned up eagerly to her companion, and her eyes and pearly teeth glistened bewitchingly in the moonlight. But Erskine did not see them. His gaze was fixed stolidly ahead at his horse.

"*Cela va sans dire,*" he replied stiffly, in his log-school French.

As they dashed through a drift at the Free Kirk manse he muttered, apparently to Prince, "I wonder if the curlers are scattering home yet? Steady, Prince! Steady!"

Though the strong lad's heart was irresponsible to Marjorie's wiles, his deep voice timbrelled musically in her ears through the frosty air.

"Oh, I forgot. This is their night, isn't it?" she replied.

But she had no thoughts for the curlers; she was playing a sweet little game of her own under the bright moon; but her shafts, poor girl, went ricochetting in the wind.

"Rather," replied Erskine dryly. "If it is not

too stormy for them when they 'gang their gaits'—as Glenfergie would say. My left ear tells me there is something brewing in the west. Whoa, Prince! Steady!"

Coming to the crossing of the roads at the Free Kirk corner, and plunging through the deep snow at a gallop, they hit against a tangled figure floundering in the drift. But on they dashed under a tight rein. Mary "thought she heard a moan behind them" as they flew forward, but preoccupied Marjorie saw nothing, and heard nothing.

Prince came prancing round the corner into "Cairnrigg" driveway, and broke into another gallop as they swung around to the front door.

"Whoa, my boy!" said Erskine. Then, jumping nimbly out at the door step, the young gallant lifted Marjorie with a firm waist-grip from between the robes.

* * * * *

"Oh! Oh! Auntie," cried Marjorie, bounding into Mrs. Cairns' warm, dreamy room. "What a lovely time we've had!"

"Come away, dearie!" Mrs. Cairns answered blithely from the warm inglenook. "And how did Erskine manage? I was a little fearful of Prince, that something might happen."

"Oh! nothing happened, Auntie! It was splendid! *Splendid!* The reins broke in the long swamp when we drove through among the wolves. But Erskine fixed them up all right! Oh! you don't know what a lovely time we've had! And—"

"Mercy on us, lassie!" screamed her Aunt, rising from her seat, with her hands raised. "What's that you're saying? The reins broke! And the wolves! And are ye a' alive? Dear me, what is't?"

"Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha!" laughed Marjorie. "Don't be alarmed, Auntie, dear! It was all just lovely!" (scattering her wraps about on chairs and table). "There is no danger, dear, where Erskine is! Oh, how we flew along!" (swinging her arms about) "through the drifts, past sleighs, through gates, and swamps, and wolves, and everything! Oh, I forgot! Mrs. Irving desired me to give you her love" (pulling off her mink hood and stroking back some tangled yellow locks). "She gave us nuts and things. Oh!" (skipping about the room) "we had such a nice time at their place. I think she is just lovely!"—peeping now at her blooming reflection in the mirror at the end of the room.

A new and delightful sensation had stirred within the sweet girlie when, a few minutes before, Erskine lifted her in his strong arms from between the robes; and she still trembled under its spell.

She was experiencing wondrous thrills of love for a gallant boy.

"Come and sit doon and tell me a' aboot it, dearie, and warm yersel'! You maun be cold, my lassie!"

"Oh, no! Auntie dear. I am quite warm. It has all been so lovely!" And smoothing back her

golden hair from her white forehead, she sat down in a joyful flutter beside her motherly auntie at the hearth-side.

* * * * *

The laird of Whistlewood was fond of a good horse, and would not rest satisfied until he possessed the best-bred driver on the north side of the Craigie River. There were as yet few thoroughbred horses in this backwoods settlement, and when Prince was brought north from Niagara, all Drumcraigie came to see him. Erskine had been given full charge of the fine grey gelding, with freedom to handle him at will. The lad came to be passionately fond of his horse, and Prince would come trotting up to him in the fields, whinnying softly when he drew near.

When brother and sister swung away from Cairnrigg door, Erskine sat looking with engrossed admiration at his handsome steed dancing down the drive.

"Isn't she lovely!" said Mary, cuddling down into the warm seat vacated by Marjorie.

"Prince isn't a 'she,' you silly goosie!"

"I mean Marjorie, you stupid boy!"

"Oh! Steady Prince! Steady!" They were now galloping toward the bridge.

Erskine was perfection in Mary's eyes, and Mary had always been deeply in love with Marjorie. And, like her mother's, Mary's aim in life seemed to be to bring "Ertie" and "Marjorie" together.

But her stalwart brother showed no signs, as yet, of responsive heart throbs. That came later, however. And makes a thrilling story that may yet be told.

On they scampered up the brae, past the Auld Kirk manse, right glad to be nearing home. When they reached Ross' cottage and swung around the corner, they met big Tom Todd with his collie dog at his heels, digging home from the curlers' dinner. Tom stepped off the track into the deep snow to let them pass, but the collie gave a bound at the horse's head, throwing him into another wild frenzy. Erskine tugged the reins with all his might, but this time his efforts failed, and away Prince bolted down the sloping road.

Tom, shuffling in the deep snow and scowling back, grumbled to his dog—"If-that-young-deevil-o' - Whustlewood's - disna - stop - his - midnight - capers - wi' - that - crazy - horse - o' - his, he'll - be - the - deeth - o' - awheen - o' - us - yet, hic - collie, ma lad."

When the runaway reached the open gate at "Whistlewood," and swung through, the sleigh overturned and brother and sister were flung violently into a deep snow-bank inside the gate.

Erskine clung to the reins, and was dragged and bumped alongside the upturned sleigh at the tail of the frantic horse. They swerved off the track and tore along through the snow among the trees, tossing and tumbling.

Quintin, warming himself at the kitchen stove, awaiting their return, heard the wild jangle of the

bells and the swishing noise and jumped to the window. He saw the struggle, ran out, and found Erskine lying braced against one of the trees with the reins wound tightly around his fingers, Prince plunging and rearing madly.

"Goad help us, Ertie! What's the metter?" he cried, as he grabbed the rings of the snaffle-bit with both hands.

The lad made no immediate answer; releasing the reins, he rose slowly to his feet, lifted the sleigh back on its runners and told Quintin to take Prince in. Then he turned toward the gate.

"Are you hurt, Mary?" he called, meeting his sister wading heavily through the snow with the robes in her arms.

"No, Ertie! Are you?" she cried anxiously.

"Not much, I think, dear! I feel a sort of catch in my left shoulder; that's all! But we mustn't alarm mother."

When brother and sister staggered into the house and commenced to take off their bedraggled wraps, Mrs. Blair saw at once that there was "something wrang." Erskine's fur coat was removed with great difficulty, but he could not raise his arms sufficiently to remove his under coat. When his mother noticed this, she at once took her big scissors and gently ripped the left sleeve from end to end. She then ripped the shoulder seam and all the remaining underclothing open. When the shoulder was uncovered it was found to be quite out of shape and beginning to swell.

The laird, who had just returned from the curlers' dinner, hurried back for Doctor Muckle, whom he had parted with a few minutes before. While he was away, Mrs. Blair—who never lost her peaceful composure, whatever the circumstances—thoughtfully broke up ice into small crumbs, wrapped them in a towel, and laid the pack on the swelling shoulder.

Erskine's injuries, and the ice application, were exceedingly painful, but no word of complaint came from the patient lad. "I am afraid you will be tired, Mother dear," he said (looking sympathetically into her pale, anxious face) "waiting up so late for us all to come home."

"Hush, Ertie; nonsense!" she replied, placing a fresh ice-pack on his shoulder. "Is that too cold for you, laddie?" noticing him wince.

"It's gy cauld, Mother, as Snuffy Owen would say" (with a wan smile), "but never mind! Keep it going till the doctor comes. I'm glad Prince escaped so well." Quintin had just been in to say that the horse "hadna a scratch."

"Goodness, Mother!" cried Mary in distress, "this arm's bleeding awfully!" She had been removing the covering from the other arm.

"Oh, that's just a bruise, girlie!" said Erskine, raising the injured arm a little to allow Mary to draw off the sleeve.

"What kind o' a' mad-cap ploy is this ye've been at noo, ye scapegrace?" snarled Doctor Muckle, as he came shuffling in with a little black bag in his hand.

"Oh, I've been through a 'bit screemage,' Doctor; and I got 'a wee the warst o't', as the shepherd will be saying about the Free Kirk curlers to-night!" answered the lad, with a smile in the direction of his father.

"God save us!" roared the doctor in a rasping voice, as he lifted the ice-pack from the injured shoulder. "Ye're a' oot o' joint; ye thrawn deevil! And what's this?"—lifting the other arm. "What kind o' slaughter hoose hae ye bin in? Ye good-for-nothing, rovin' wratch! Oot the road, Whustlewood!" turning against the anxious laird who was looking over his shoulder. "I'll soon put ye thegither, ye rampagin' neer-do-weel!"—flinging off his old, snuff-besmeared coat.

"Rip up some clean rags for me, Mrs. Blair! An' you, lassie" (turning to Mary), "what are ye girnin' at there? Gang and bring me some warm water as quick as yer heels will carry ye! A fine ploy this is ye have a' been in! A fine ploy tae begin the new year wi'! Are ye no' ashamed o' yersels?" he growled, as he shuffled about the room, rolling back his shirt sleeves.

Surgery was the old doctor's delight; and it did not take him long to reduce the dislocated shoulder. Lifting his lumpy foot and placing it gently beside Erskine on the seat of his chair, he slipped his thin knee up into the patient's arm-pit, placing one of his bony hands on the wounded shoulder to fix the scapula. With the other crumpled hand he pressed the elbow slowly over his knee. In a moment the

ball of the arm slipped into the shoulder socket, and the trick was done.

Erskine tightened his teeth and turned pale, but otherwise endured the straining operation manfully.

"Noo, ye tousy rascal, that's fixed!" snarled the doctor; "and will be as sound as ever in a week if ye stop yer capers! Let me see yer ither arm. Ay!"—as he turned up the bleeding arm—"that'll need a stitch or two," scowling at a wound torn to the bone. "Gie me the basin o' water, lassie!" he snapped.

After washing the torn arm in gloomy silence, he shuffled over to the table, opened up his little pack, and brought out a long needle and a silken thread. In a few minutes he had the ragged edges of the wound neatly drawn together, and the arm bound up with a clean, white bandage.

The lad kept a firm mouth, but turned faint during this painful operation, and had to have half a gill of brandy to revive him. It should be remembered that there were no hypnotics in use in Drumcraigie in those days, for the merciful alleviation of pain.

"Noo!" said the doctor, as he drew on his coat and faced the family. "That's din! And dinna let me ever hear o' ony mair o' sic midnight escapades wi' brats o' lassies behint a horse that wouldn'a be safe for even Tibb, the tinker, tae drive!" Turning about and crooking his elbows angrily, he continued in a roar: "What does onybody want

wi' a blude horse like that onyway, in a God-for-saken backwuds place like this? You'll no' be sateesfied, Whustlewood, till ye hae a race-track next. And then ye'll hae a' the blacklegs and gamblers frae Dan tae Beersheba here, racin' at ye'r heels!"

This harangue had the effect of making Erskine



"Hae a dram, Doctor, before ye go!"

forget his pains, but poor Mary sat trembling beside him, and Mrs. Blair stood bewildered. The laird, meanwhile, was over at the cupboard bringing out the decanter, and enjoying a quiet chuckle to himself.

"*Hae a dram, Doctor, before ye go!*" said Whistlewood, turning round with the decanter in his hand.

The doctor reached for the bottle, lifted it up and glared at it.

"Is this some o' Peter's poosion?" he enquired, pouring out an inch of its contents and glowering into the glass. "Or is it some o' Gooderham's stuff? I'm telt ye'r drinkin' Gooderham noo! Guid help yer extravagance!"

"Ay! that's good rum, doctor!" answered Whistlewood smiling. "Hae a bit o' the wife's oat-cake wi' it?" passing the plate.

"Hoo is Mrs. Muckle, Doctor? I forgot to ask," ventured Mrs. Blair.

"Oh, her!" (scowling). "She's like a' the rest. Wearin' new bonnets, and gaddin' aboot!"

When the doctor had finished his dram, he turned a wry face on the laird, and rasped through his curled lips;

"Weel, Whustlewood, that's the wershhest whisky Goad Almighty ever made!"

Then he pulled out his snuff-box and gave it a sharp tap, opened the lid, helped himself to a big pinch of snuff, turned his back on the household, picked up his black pack and shuffled out through the door without speaking another word.

* * * * *

Over at "Cairnrigg," in the sma' hour of the morning, Cairns and his wife sat toasting their toes at the warm fireside, after Sir Adam had retired for the night and Marjorie had gone to her room.

"I'm thinkin', gude-man, Marjorie and Erskine

are gettin' gy chief!" Mrs. Cairns whispered to the laird, significantly.

"Whew!" puckering his mouth. "That's the airt o' the wind, is't?"

"Whist! She'll hear ye!"

"A' weel!" sighed the laird with a lowered voice, resuming his gaze into the fire. "Lads will be lads, and lassies, lassies. But" (turning to his



CAIRNRIGG

wife) "what will Sir Adam think o't?" he whispered.

"Haud yer havers! And dinna mak' a fule o' yersel'! To hear ye, a body wud think they were meanin' something!"

"Meanin' here, or meanin' there, gude-wife, siccan hot blood's no' canny!" And leaning back with his hands clasped behind his head, his feet stretched lazily forward, the laird yawned wearily,

as he concluded, "A' weel! She's-a-bonnie-sweet-lass, is-Marjorie!"

"Ay! and what's Erskine?" snapped the gude-wife, staring across at him, over her spectacles.

"Goad, wumman! I'm stumpt!"—sitting up briskly and tapping his snuff-mull excitedly. "Ye've stumpt me, gude-wife!" Taking snuff and shaking out his bandanna, he continued:

"Erskine has na his match frae Johnnie Groat's tae Land's—I mean frae Sandwich tae-tae-tae Quebec!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

First Footing

WHEN we left the Farmers' Inn at midnight, shadows from clumps of dense broken clouds, drifting before the moon, scudded across the fields of snow. A storm seemed brewing.

Over in the woods we heard the fallen timber snap, and under our feet the frozen board-walk cracked as we passed along the street.

Out on the highroads the wind puffed and whistled through the rail fences, sweeping up drifts across our paths.

Away in the long swamp, the hungry yowl of a wolf rang weirdly through the clearing; and, far and near, we heard our collies barking back a challenge from their kennel doors.

Down the road to Kinettles, over the brae on the Guelph Road, along the riverside to Garafraxa, and up the Owen Sound Road, the powdery snow whirled over snake-fences in silvery screens.

And by the glint of the moon, as the clouds passed by, we saw, here and there, white curling smoke whiffling away from homestead chimneys, beckoning us home to warm firesides.

The shepherd and Matha left the inn together, linked arm in arm.

"Man Matha, wis yon no' grawnd?"

"Dae ye mean Blacklockie?"

"Ay! Hae!"—taking a pinch of snuff and handing his mull to his companion.

"Toot, man! I liked Irvie's speech best. He's a lad, Irvie! Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha! An' what did ye think o' McWhirter?"

"Oh! he wis grawnd tae! A'fu' clever!"

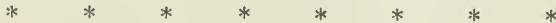
With the festal warmth still upon them, the two cronies chatted on cheerily till they reached the bridge. Leaning awhile on the arm of it for a final crack before they separated, the shepherd said: "I see a licht in your wee window yonder, I'm thinkin', Matha!"

"Ou-ay! The wife aye burns extra cannels whan we win oor games, Ha-Ha-Ha-Ha!" Matha's long, loud laugh found a clattering echo in the rocky cliffs of the winding river.

"Dod, man, Matha! It's fine tae hae her wi' ye! My ain wee wifey has been lang gone. She wud hae been a prood wumman this nicht. But I'll sune be wi' her, I'm thinkin'! Aich, me! but it's cauld, Matha!" With that, the old, shivering shepherd drew his long tartan plaid tightly about him.

"Toots man! ye're haverin'."

"No, man! I'm wearin' awa', man! Wearin' awa'! Aich ay! But I can tell ye this, Matha. I hae nae misdoots! Nae misdoots! And it'll be a' the better. A' the better! Hae!" offering his mull again to Matha. And they had a last friendly pinch of snuff together before they parted.



In all their sports and revelry, the men of Drumcraigie, for the most part, never overstepped the bounds of prudence in their potations. Sturdy freemen that they were, they frowned upon any proposition that interfered with their personal liberty. They drank their dram as they ate their daily bread, giving thanks to God as heartily for it. A pale, whining teetotaler, coming amongst them, seeking pledges, and advocating the enactment of a teetotal law, was looked upon as "ill faured." "*What ails the man?*" Blacklockie asked. So it should be borne in mind that every curler left the Farmers' Inn that night with a firm foot and a clear head.

* * * * *

The shepherd's lad, Willie, sat up and kept the fire burning and the hearth warm for his father's homecoming, with the kettle on the swee for his toddy, and the oat-cakes ready on the dresser table.

As the weary champion of the game that day hobbled his way up the brae side, he saw a light in the gable end window of his wee cottage, shining bright and warm, and he had his "thochts." He recalled the days o' auld lang syne; his little cottage on the hill "at home"; his young, blithesome wifey and the bairns; the two he had left behind him buried on the mountain-side—his wife and baby girlie; the flocks he drove and herded on the rugged hill-slopes in the old land; the lambs

of the flocks; the old days o' "murk and smoor"; and his feeble efforts herding the Great Shepherd's flock about the Kirk, here. And a tinge of sadness affected his happy mind as he dragged his way along.

At the Free Kirk crossing he plunged into a deep drift to escape a horse and sleigh dashing wildly across the corner. But he was too late. The runner of the sleigh hit the old man on the shoulder like a hammer stroke; and he toppled over into the snow with a long, weary moan.

In a little while he was staggering on his feet again, hobbling on, delving through the windrows of dry snow, feeling his way carefully with his staff.

When he came to his cottage, and was tottering down the icy incline that led to the door, the poor old man lost his balance; his feet shot from under him, and down he fell on his back, every bone in his crumpled ruckle cracking to the marrow.

"*Is that you, faither?*" cried Willie, opening the door.

"Ay, laddie, man! I slippit ma fit! Auch, ay!" (now on his feet and holding his sides), "an' I had ither tummels in the snaw . . . an' knocks doon . . . But I'm nane the waur!"

With the help of Willie, he screwed himself into the fireside, laid off his heavy plaid, and fell into his arm chair.

"Ye'll be wearied waitin' for me, Willie, ma lad," he said in short gasping breaths. "I'll-no-bother-wi'-the-toddy-th'-nicht. An' if ye'll just

draw aff ma boots and gie me ma slippers and hand
me doon the Book, I'll warm masel', and ye can
gang awa' tae yer bunk!"

"Ay! ay! That's fine!" he continued, as
Willie pushed the warm slippers over his cold feet.

"Aich! Aich!" he sighed. "Noo, man, guid
nicht! An' dinna forget yer prayers, ma laddie!
Aich, ay!" leaning back in his chair.

When Willie had gone, and was asleep, the
shepherd put on his spectacles and opened the
Book.

Reaching over to a little box shelf at the side of
the chimney, where he kept his few precious relics
and keepsakes, he took out a miniature portrait
of his wife and bairns.

Then leaning back in his chair, with his feet on
the warm hearth, the picture in one hand and with
the other hand resting on the Word of God, he
dreamed—and dreamed—and slept.

Long hours after the other curlers, of the day
before, were sound asleep in their warm beds, the
shepherd slept on in his old arm chair.

* * * * *

Early in the morning of the New Year—following
the good old Scottish custom—the lairds, in couples,
with flasks of drink in their hands, were on their
happy "First Footing," going the rounds of Drum-
craigie with their cheerful greetings.

At the rising of the sun, McWhirter and Whistle-
wood came to the shepherd's cottage.

"I'se warrant William will no' be up as early th' day as he was yesterday!" said the master, smiling.

"No, man! There's naething like curling for getting folk up!" returned Whistlewood, laughing. And the two slid down the slope to the cottage door.



"I'se warrant William will no be up as early th' day as he was yesterday!"

Doors were never locked in Drumcraigie in those days; nor are they to this day. The string hangs out on the latch, day and night the year round. All comers were welcomed. So the master and Whistlewood entered Willam's cottage, calling out their cheery greetings.

'First-footing, my man!' they cried. "First-footing! And a Happy New Y—God save us!"

"Keep's a'!" they gasped, staggering back, astounded. "He's dead!" "He's gone!" they whispered.

Alas! it was true! The spirit of the kindly shepherd had taken its flight.

The Great Gatherer had come in the night, in the stillness before the dawn; and carried away the ripened sheaf. And the good old man was now enjoying his "First-footing" and his Happy New Year in the "Land o' the Leal."

The candle on the table was burnt out. The clock on the shelf was still. The cinders on the hearth were ashes. All was cold in the little cottage—very cold. But, on the calm, smoothed face of the old man sitting there, a happy smile met the golden rays of the rising sun that streamed through his wee broken window.

The picture of his wife and bairns was in the clasp of his left hand. And the fingers of his right hand rested on the blessed words we all learned at our mother's knee:

*"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow
of death,
I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."*

THE END.

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